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HERBERT LACY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF GRANBY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

La morale est la science des sciences à ne la considérer que sous le rapport du calcul; et il y a toujours des limites à l'esprit de ceux qui n'ont pas senti l'harmonie de la nature des choses avec les devoirs de l'homme.

MADAME DE STAEL.

VOL. I.

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1828.

TO

THOMAS LISTER, ESQ.

OF

ARMITAGE PARK,

Staffordshire.

To no one can I dedicate the following work with more propriety than to yourself, and to none certainly with greater pleasure. Whatever may be my attachment to literary pursuits, I consider myself as owing it entirely to the kindness and assiduity with which, from my earliest years, you have directed my attention to the cultivation of elegant letters. If I have fallen short of attaining the excellence which your parental partiality might

lead you to hope, I must attribute my deficiency to any cause, rather than to the want of your encouragement and assistance. It is an additional source of satisfaction to me in making to you the offering of this little work, that it will afford some exemplification of filial duties, and convey my own sense, however imperfectly, of the devotedness and respect which are due to the parental character. By no one ought this sentiment to be more sincerely and deeply felt than by myself: convinced as I am, that to those ties of perfect confidence, friendship, and esteem, which your kindness has established between us, I owe the principal happiness of my life. With the truest gratitude and respect, believe me,

Your very affectionate Son,

THE AUTHOR.

HERBERT LACY.

CHAPTER I.

I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.
No; an he were, I would burn my study.
Much ado about Nothing.

"PRAY, Lady Appleby, did not you say that Mr. Lacy was coming here to-day?"

This important question was put to her ladyship one morning about the latter end of July, in the drawing-room at Huntley Park (of which Lord Appleby was the noble owner), in the presence of a small party, consisting of the lady of Viscount Malvern, son of the Earl of Rod-

borough, Agnes Morton her sister, and two Miss Tyrwhitts, daughters of Lord and Lady Appleby.

The querist was Mrs. Poole, an elderly widow of comfortable fortune, brisk, loquacious, and inquisitive; fond of communicating information, and eager in collecting it; a skilful match-maker, an unrivalled genealogist, and, alas! a frequent cause of mischief, though not often a wilful one. She was a good-humoured woman, who had lived much in the world, who was never dull but when alone, and whose society was greatly sought. Mrs. Poole knew every body, and every body knew Mrs. Poole. She became a widow at an early age, had no children, and few concerns of her own to attend to, and therefore very naturally took a considerable interest in those of other people.

"Pray, Lady Appleby," said the above-mentioned lady, "did not you say that Mr. Lacy was coming here to-day?"

"I dare say I did," replied Lady Appleby, a tedious, speechifying woman; "for we *do*

expect him; and I hope," she added, with a gracious bend, as if she were addressing the absent person, "to have the pleasure of detaining him some time."

"Does he come alone?"

"I trust not; for I expect to see him accompanied by his amusing brother-in-law, Mr. Hartley."

"Do tell me something about the Lacys," said Mrs. Poole, turning to Lady Malvern; "I have not seen them this age. Of course you know them very well; they are such near neighbours of your father.

"Lord Rodborough is not such a very near neighbour," replied Lady Malvern, rather drily.

"Lord! my dear, I did not mean your father-in-law; I was thinking of your own father's place at Dodswell, which cannot, I should suppose, be more than six miles from Lacy Park; and that is what I call a pleasant, easy visiting distance. Do you see much of them?"

"We never saw any of them before I married

—I suppose it is much the same now—is it not, Agnes?"

"Precisely," said Miss Morton.

"But how odd that is!" pursued Mrs. Poole; "and do you never meet them anywhere?"

"No, never."

"And what is the reason?"

"I don't know," replied Miss Morton. "But I believe the fault lies chiefly in themselves. My father says that Sir William Lacy thinks none of his neighbours worth visiting. I have heard some people attribute it less to pride than to indolence: I have no right to give any opinion myself."

"Oh, as to pride," said Lady Malvern, "I don't know what should make them proud, unless it is always staying at home, and seeing nobody better than themselves. I am sure nobody pays them much attention; and they are never seen in the world, and don't come to town, and Lord Rodborough does not visit *him;* and as for *her*, I remember Lady Rodborough

saying to me one day last winter, 'Louisa,' 'who *was* Lady Lacy?' and I remember I could not tell her: and, by the by, who are they, Mrs. Poole?"

"She was a Bellingham of the Upperville family; and as for the Lacys, they, you know, are as old as the flood, and very well connected too. Sir William Lacy's mother was Lady Mary Loftus, aunt of the mad Lord Loftus, whose wife ran away with Sir Clement Packworth, the brother of the man who shot Lord Cheadle, husband of the naughty Lady Cheadle, whose brother was that Colonel Blake, who won so much from poor George Templeton, who had just entered his regiment, and whose sister made that unhappy low connection which we were lamenting the other day. Sir William Lacy, when I knew him first, was a very promising young man; but I hear of late that he has grown quite a mope; I hope the son will not take after him."

"I hope not," said Lady Mal[illegible]n, in a tone that contradicted the assertion; "but I *must* say I think he will, if I may judge from what I have seen of him."

"Perhaps you have seen a good deal."

"Oh, no, dear! no; I pretend to know very little of him, or he of me, I dare say. We just speak—scarcely that. I remember this very spring at Almack's, I was standing talking to Lady Rodborough, and he came by; and he spoke *en passant* to Lady Rodborough, and then he stared at me as if he hardly knew whether to bow or not; and I acknowledged him—and then he bent in a sort of way as if he thought he did me a favour, which I thought rather ridiculous."

"I am sure," said Lady Appleby, who always apologized for those who wanted it, though with more benevolence than judgment—"I am sure he could not have known it was you."

"I believe his eyes are tolerably good. No, Lady Appleby, depend upon it, it was mere

bad manners. I know many people who don't like him."

"Mr. Sackville likes him," observed Agnes Morton.

"People general like those," said Lady Malvern, "who are under obligations to them."

"Obligations! how? do tell me;" said Miss Tyrwhitt to Agnes Morton. "What does he owe to Mr. Sackville?"

"Only his life," replied Agnes, with a smile. "They were in Italy together—Mr. Lacy was near being drowned in the Lago Maggiore, and Mr. Sackville fortunately saved him."

"He is a fine young man," said Mrs. Poole.

"Who? Mr. Sackville?"

"No, my dear, I should not speak of him as a young man, though, to be sure, he is not much more than thirty. I was speaking of Mr. Lacy, who *is* a young man, and a fine young man too."

"Perhaps he may be," said Miss Morton; "but I feel very much disposed to dislike him."

"Why so?"

"Oh—why—because it is my duty—is it not, sister? You must know we hoist the black flag at Dodswell, and give no quarter to a Lacy."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Poole, "you will allow him to be good-looking."

"I won't allow him to be good for anything, if I can help it," replied Miss Morton; "but, perhaps, Mrs. Poole, you are not aware that my dislike proceeds from true meritorious party-spirit. To tell you the truth, I have never seen this gentleman whom I am so ready to abuse."

"I should have been more surprised at your disliking him, if you had seen him;" replied Mrs. Poole.

"It is a pity," resumed Miss Morton, laughing, "to waste such compliments upon absent persons. Do say something flattering to us. I long to engage you to be *my* trumpeter."

"Thank you, my dear; but I had rather not, unless I could keep the office to myself, and prevent others from praising you too; and that would be impossible."

"My dear Mrs. Poole, you overflow with civil sayings. You are like the fairy-tale girl that talked pearls and diamonds. I cannot bear this fire myself—I must turn it off upon Mr. Lacy. How long have you known him?"

"Ever since May. I saw him one morning at Lady Ashborne's, talked about him after he was gone, and was told he was clever and pleasant, and so forth; and it happened just then that I was looking about for some new young men to put on my list, for I always like to know a good many; and several lately had married off, and he was just the person I wanted; so I said, 'Lady Ashborne, do send him to me, and tell him I used to know his father, and I must have him go next week to my friend Mrs. Chatterley's little party!' Somehow or other he never came. However, about a week afterwards, one night, I forget where, Lady Ashborne brought him up to me. I asked him to a party, and saw him afterwards

several times, both at my own house and elsewhere."

"And what was his style of conversation?"

"Merely the style of all the world—he was lively, and pleasant, and full of chit-chat, and knew what was going on, and told one all the accidents, and gamblings, and elopements, and marriages that were to be, or were not to be."

"Scandal, in short," interrupted Lady Malvern.

"Why, to be sure, some people might call it scandal—though, I don't remember that he ever spoke particularly ill of any one."

"Oh, but he must;" pursued Lady Malvern—"you are only too good-natured, Mrs. Poole, and won't remember any thing unpleasant."

"Well—I don't know—I hope I am—all I can say, is, that I found him agreeable."

"Indeed," said Lady Appleby, "he is very agreeable, and as for scandal I can satisfy you on that point: he never told me an anecdote in

his life, and always expressed himself upon every occasion in the most obliging manner possible."

"Now really, my dear Lady Appleby," said Lady Malvern, with a provoking smile, "you are a very cruel person: that was the unkindest cut of all. 'Expresses himself on every occasion in the most obliging manner possible!' Quite intolerable, I assure you. There is nothing more disagreeable than to meet with people who never contradict you: it is the worst compliment they could pay: it seems as if they abstained from opposing one out of pure compassion for the weakness of one's understanding I cannot describe what I have suffered from those good creatures that are always of one's own opinion."

"I don't think," observed Mrs. Poole, "that you will find young Lacy that sort of person. I should say, he was rather satirically inclined. Some declare, he wrote those lines about three of the Almack's Patronesses, whose titles begin with

the same letter. 'Three ladies in three distant counties born'—I won't go on—for it is too severe; but I hardly believe it is his, for I know he positively denies it. He is decidedly guilty of the prologue to the Private Theatricals at Norton; and you may see some other things of his when you next meet Lady Barbara Tempest."

"Thank you, Mrs. Poole," said Lady Malvern; "I am sadly in want of a bribe to make me wish to meet Lady Barbara; but I am afraid Mr. Lacy's lines are hardly sufficient. Heaven defend me from going again to that dreadfully clever woman's town parties! The rooms smelt of new publications, and one meets dingy foreign *savans*, and people that try to look as if they were prodigious thinkers, and talk, by way of light conversation, about 'a superior article in the last Review.' And so this Mr. Lacy is an ally of Lady Barbara? Very well—that is quite enough.—If he is literary, I give him up—I do abhor a wise young man."

"Oh, I assure you," exclaimed Miss Tyrwhitt, "he is not a wise young man, indeed."

"Then pray," said Agnes, "prove him a foolish one as quickly as you can, and put the poor creature out of his misery."

"No, but he is not foolish either. I only mean, he does not talk gravely, and learnedly, and use long words, and that sort of thing; but talks—just all about anything in the world."

"Nonsense, in short.'

"Well—yes—perhaps it is."

"That is conclusive," said Lady Malvern.

"I can tell you more," resumed Mrs. Poole, "which some may think to his advantage. He is said to be only too agreeable, and likes to turn young ladies' heads, and then turns away his own, and will have no more to say to them. He is not to be fixed—in fact, a dangler—that is what I have heard of him."

"Dear! that is odd," said Lady Appleby. "It was only the other day I was told that he was engaged to be married to Miss Hartley, his

brother-in-law's sister—was not it so, Augusta? You must have heard as well as I."

Miss Tyrwhitt did not seem to have a very clear recollection, but said, she believed she did hear something about his being either engaged or going to be.

"To be what?" said Mrs. Poole.

"Engaged!"

"Oh, *going to be* engaged—a very critical situation! I believe, Miss Morton, you are the only person present that has not seen this gentleman; what do you think of him from our description?"

"Indeed," said Miss Morton, "I am excessively puzzled—let me consider—what have you made him out to be? Retired, sociable, rude, civil, complaisant, satirical, wise, nonsensical, engaged, and a dangler. One may perhaps be curious to see a person who reconciles these contradictions, but, I think, one probably should not like him."

The subject was then dropped, after each had

concurred in the reflection, that in a very short time they should be presented with an ample opportunity of forming or re-modelling their various opinions of the person in question.

CHAPTER II.

There are but three ways for a man to revenge himself of the censure of the world; to despise it, to return the like, or to endeavour to live so as to avoid it. The first of these is usually pretended; the last is almost impossible; the universal practice is for the second.

SWIFT.

AT Lacy Park, a fine old place, situated in one of the midland counties of England, about thirty miles from the residence of Lord Appleby, lived Sir William Lacy, a baronet of the honourable creation of 1611, of ancient family, and ample fortune. At the period at which our tale commences, he was "somewhat inclining to threescore," and in addition to the above mentioned external advantages, was blessed with good health, a wife who seldom thwarted him, a promising son of about four and twenty, and a daughter one year older, who was happily

married to the only son of a late friend and neighbour. He also enjoyed the most perfect independence, was not burthened either with parliamentary duties, or the thankless office of a justice of the peace; had few calls upon his attention from the affairs of others, and had a steward, in whom he placed such reliance, as to feel himself bound to bestow very little upon his own. If leisure, therefore, be mainly conducive to a life of happiness, Sir William Lacy may be fairly presumed to have attained it: for no one probably had his time more thoroughly at his own disposal, or pursued with greater regularity his even tenor of self-indulgence. He was a man of good abilities, but great indolence, an indolence which, though comparatively little apparent during the volatile period of youth, or even in the vigour of mature manhood, had acquired a visible influence during his later years. His very virtues savoured of it: they were all passive. He was good humoured, purely because it was too much trouble to be vexed; and though

he had but little active generosity, and never volunteered a gift, he seldom resisted even an unreasonable request. He had a considerable fund of native humour, and though he never exerted himself to shine in conversation, his remarks were generally pointed and amusing. He had drawn copious stores from books, and was at the same time, a shrewd observer of passing events, and the conduct and character of others. He had never been a man of pleasure, nor had he any thing in common with that class, except a thorough hatred of business. His habits were literary; that is to say, he was one of those who amuse themelves in skimming the ever varying surface of literature, in glancing over new publications, and culling entertaining trifles from the pages of reviews and magazines.

The productions of his pen were short and various. Divers of his poetical *jeux d'esprit* were dispersed in albums. He had written one article in a magazine now defunct, and had addressed a letter to Sylvanus Urban, describing a

live toad that was found in a stone quarry on his estate. He had begun many political pamphlets; but always, either the time went by, or he changed his opinion, or grew tired of the subject before he had finished it. These pursuits amused, and in some degree occupied him; and, at any rate, they cheated him into a belief that if his body was supine, his mind, at least, was active.

When young, Sir William mixed much with the world, and seemed fond of society; but since his marriage, finding, probably, that the hospitalities of life entailed upon him greater exertion than during the unshackled period of his celibacy, or that time had deprived society of its zest, he became a stout supporter of seclusion, discontinued from time to time the expected calls and invitations which civility demanded towards his neighbours, till friend after friend dropped off, and he found himself at the expiration of twenty years, in the centre of a large and hospi-

table neighbourhood, almost in a state of solitude.

Meanwhile, there was one passion which, though generally of too turbulent a nature to be the companion of indolence, had attained a rapid growth, and been fostered by this very seclusion. This passion was pride. Mixing little with his equals and superiors, and communing chiefly with his own mind, or with his inferiors in age, talent, or station, what wonder if he became inflated with a high sense of his own importance? Mortifications also reached him. He could not but be sensible that the world which he had long neglected, had in return neglected him. He endeavoured to feel the proud contempt of injured merit, to think how much happier he was in himself, than the vain pleasures of society could make him, and to "dash the world aside, and bid it pass."

But these efforts were generally fruitless. Often of late, would he sigh for civilities, which

he had once denounced as troublesome, and long to resume that station, which, when once lost, was not easily regained. Besides, he felt that the first step must now be made by him, and this step he scorned to take; and pride rivetted those chains which indolence had first imposed. Thus, though naturally a good-natured, easy, cheerful man, he became testy and irascible, tenderly suspicious of neglect and insult, and ready to trace in the most innocent conduct of his neighbours a disposition to affront him.

Lady Lacy was a well disposed woman, of weak judgment and strong prejudices. Her chief defect, was a love of petty mystery, through which she frequently magnified trifles, and sometimes produced misunderstandings, which she had not the ability to repair. She was an excessive wonderer at nothings, and though with scarce sufficient discernment to protect her from the most obvious snare, thought herself shrewd and politic, and could generally discover deep and hidden motives for the simplest

actions. Bating a little prying love of scandal, she took a charitable pleasure in the welfare of her neighbours, and was unimpeachable in her exercise of the important duties of wife and mother.

Sir William and Lady Lacy had only one son and one daughter, of whom the latter was married, much to the satisfaction of her parents, to Mr. Hartley, a young man of good fortune in that neighbourhood. Mrs. Hartley was in most respect the converse of her mother, quick and intelligent, somewhat decisive in her tone, and masculine in her modes of thinking. She was handsome, elegant, and well-bred, and nothing was requisite but a slight diminution of coldness and bluntness, to make her at all times very agreeable.

Herbert Lacy differed from his parents in many respects, as widely as his sister did. To all the intelligence and literary taste of Sir William Lacy, he added the mental vigour and physical activity which his father wanted. He

was rapid, perhaps hasty, in his judgments; but he had a mind which eagerly sought conviction, and never cherished with puny partiality, a preconceived opinion, or feared to retract an erroneous assertion. He was generous, open, unsuspicious, lively, and enterprising, somewhat fickle in his pursuits, but ardent in the furtherance of them. He was perhaps rather too much dazzled with the specious lustre of versatile accomplishments, and ambitious of the reputation of knowing a little of every thing; a reputation which most of his acquaintance were ready to grant him. His manners were agreeable, and his conversation varied and amusing.

His father's seclusion had not influenced Herbert's habits; and, considering his youth, he had been a good deal seen in the world, and had a tolerably extensive acquaintance with the best society. He had nicely honourable feelings, some pride of birth, a good deal of fastidiousness, and a disposition to *hauteur*, to-

wards those whom he disliked. His habits were naturally sociable, and he had just that proper proportion of vanity, which creates in some degree the "*besoin de succès*," and prompts its possessor to put in requisition his powers of pleasing. He saw with pain, the indolent seclusion to which his father had doomed himself, and lamented it the more, when he perceived its unhappy effect upon his mind, in producing a feeling of morbid pride, to which he would otherwise have been a stranger. At first, he was disposed to think, that there was little cause for this irritable dread of neglect, and doubted not that his father still maintained his proper station in the estimation of his neighbours. But a county meeting, to which Sir William, with some difficulty, consented to accompany his son, tended to alter this opinion. Herbert Lacy then perceived to his sorrow, that, though some outward civility was displayed towards his father, there were few indications of friendship or respect. He was

viewed by his neighbours, as one who had awakened from a long trance, and could neither know nor care much, concerning any subject in which they felt most interested.

Many did not know him, and few that did were cordial in their manner. They made punctilious inquiries after Lady Lacy; and then the speakers would turn away, as if they had discharged their duty, and enter into cheerful converse with those with whom they had broken bread, and mixed in active scenes and useful labours that afforded subjects of mutual interest. Herbert saw that these demonstrations of indifference, were not lost upon his father, and that, in spite of his assumed cheerfulness, they mortified him deeply. He sincerely hoped that wounded pride would urge him to regain that consideration to which but for his own besetting sin, he was so justly entitled: but alas! it operated to his disadvantage, as such a passion always does; and with grief, did Herbert hear him denounce his neighbours, as a tiresome set of senseless boors; ridi-

cule with no inconsiderable humour the objects and conduct of the meeting, and profess his resolution, never again to subject himself to the useless penance of herding with such a band of uncongenial spirits.

Encountered, as Sir William Lacy was, on almost every side, with the just retaliation of neglect, it is creditable to state, that there was but one family whom he regarded with any feeling of enmity. The head of this obnoxious house was Mr. Morton, a gentleman as little resembling him in his modes of life as in dignity of descent. Mr. Morton's father, a man of mean extraction, had accumulated a considerable fortune in the iron trade, and having appropriated a large part of it to the purchase of the Dodswell estate, property situated not far from Lacy Park, had early endeavoured to sink the manufacturer in the country gentleman; and being ambitious of securing to his son those advantages in which he himself was deficient, spared no expence in his education, pushed him on-

ward into the polite world, and urged him to cultivate the society of persons of rank, and if possible to ennoble his escutcheon by a dignified alliance. All this his son, the present Mr. Morton, succeeded in performing; for he soon got into possession of a large and fashionable acquaintance, and eventually married Lady Louisa Eustace, daughter of the Duke of Swansea.

Mr. Morton was a man of gentlemanly manners and prepossessing appearance. To education and society he owed much; but Nature, which does not always disdain to bestow the most aristocratic distinctions of face and figure, on those whose claims cannot be ratified by the Herald's College, had been highly liberal to Mr. Morton; and he certainly bore, in a remarkable degree, that subtle, indefinable grace, which bespeaks at once the gentleman. To this he chiefly owed his success, for though a man of pleasure, he was not strictly one of gaiety, and though from a knowledge of the world, and

a consequent fund of anecdote, he was tolerably pleasing, he never contributed much to the entertainment of any one, or could justly receive other than the undistinguishing praise of good-breeding. His talents were, perhaps, rather above than below mediocrity; but he had never been urgently called upon to exert them, and they were, therefore, less efficient than they might have been. Of pride, he had no small portion; and it was, perhaps, rendered more vigilant by the reflection that he was maintaining a station in society, to which neither his birth, his fortune, nor his talents, viewed singly, might seem to entitle him.

Such a person would naturally be irritated by the cool and careless treatment which he experienced from Sir William Lacy, a man superior in rank and descent, and whose inhospitality it was therefore obvious to attribute to pride. At the same time, the baronet felt more jealous than he was disposed to admit, of the popularity and influence which this

low born person had obtained in the neighbourhood.

A number of trifling causes also contributed, on either side, to swell the amount of their respective grievances. In the first place, Mr. Morton had been an unsuccessful suitor of Lady Lacy's; and, shortly after his marriage, thought proper to betray his resentment, by repulsive treatment of that lady. Moreover, on an argument which once took place between the gentlemen, Sir William unfortunately let fall a compliment to Mr. Morton upon his skill in *irony*. The baronet was notoriously addicted to punning, and was thought to have uttered the remark with a sly significance of manner; but, though appearances were against him, the offence was really unintentional. Mr. Morton, however, thought otherwise; and this equivocal allusion to his father's trade galled his pride severely; the more, perhaps, because it was too questionable an affront to be openly noticed. Soon afterwards, Sir William Lacy, who, as lord of a

neighbouring manor, had the right of fishing in a river which flowed for some distance through the property of Mr. Morton, wishing to exercise his right, sent his keeper with a request to the latter to be allowed to enter upon his lands. Mr. Morton, forgetting for a while his usual guarded courtesy, replied that Sir William Lacy's people had full liberty to fish the river; but that, in justice to his tenants, whose crops were now in a state of forwardness, he must positively forbid them from setting their foot on either bank.

These were some of the petty circumstances which sowed disunion in the breasts of two men whose pleasing manners and gentlemanly habits ought to have produced a mutual friendship. It would have been fortunate, perhaps, had there been any one great ground of offence in place of the trivial causes which now existed. There would then have been something to forgive and forget; hands would have been shaken, and they would have been better friends in consequence. But now there was nothing to war-

rant enmity, and a great deal which seemed to justify dislike, and upon which they could never come to an explanation, because they would each have been ashamed of allowing that any one circumstance had ever dwelt in their recollection. Therefore, after debarring themselves of all proper means of fairly estimating each other's character, they sat down in satisfied dislike, each investing the other with disagreeable attributes of their own choosing. Sir William Lacy regarded Mr. Morton as an ill-bred, assuming, low-minded person; while that gentleman viewed the baronet as proud, cynical, illiberal, and selfish.

Lady Louisa Morton was a weak, dawdling woman, who, having naturally rather delicate health, indulged in playing the invalid till she became at last almost as incapable of exertion as she would fain have been believed. She was not unamiable, but had many of the petty faults to which a weak mind, under the influence of indolence and ill health, is naturally exposed.

She had five children living, two sons and three daughters.

The eldest daughter, Lady Malvern, was now about four-and-twenty; a pretty woman, not positively unamiable, but rather spoilt, with no little vanity and pretension, and an uneasy aspiration after fashionable distinction. She was fond of her husband and her sister Agnes, to whom she was an active chaperon, and whom she was proud of producing, though not so proud as she was of being the daughter-in-law of Lady Rodborough, whom she thought the first of human beings, and who treated her with great contempt. Agnes was about four years younger, and had herself a younger sister, Marianne, then about fifteen. The two sons were of the intermediate ages of twenty-three and eighteen. The eldest was *attaché* to an embassy. The youngest, who was destined for the church, was just entered at Oxford.

Agnes, the second daughter, had lived very little with her parents. At an early age she

had been adopted by Mrs. Denham, sister of Mr. Morton, who had married a man of good fortune, and who, having no children, entreated Lady Louisa and her brother to give up to her their second daughter. The prospects held out by this proposal were such as inclined them to accede to it; and the little Agnes was consequently resigned to the tuition of her aunt, who, being a woman of good principles and strong sense, gave to her niece an education in every respect excellent, and infinitely better than she could have received under the feeble administration of Lady Louisa.

Mrs. Denham became a widow soon after this precious charge devolved upon her: she, however, long survived her husband, and had now been dead about two years, Agnes being at the period of that event little more than seventeen. She left handsome legacies to the brothers and sisters of her adopted charge, and to several of her own friends and relations; but the bulk of her fortune, amounting to eighty thousand

pounds, was settled upon Agnes and her issue, and, in failure of issue, was to be divided at her death between her brothers and sisters, and their children. Other conditions were annexed to the bequest. The money was vested in two trustees, who were also appointed her guardians, and four hundred a year was to be paid to her out of it, till she arrived at the age of twenty-four, at which time she was to be entitled to the annual interest of the whole.

She was also to become entitled to the whole income of her fortune upon her marriage previous to that age, provided that such marriage was contracted with the consent of her guardians and trustees. But if she married without their consent before she arrived at the age of twenty-four, she was to forfeit all but the sum of ten thousand pounds, and the remainder was to go to her brothers and sisters, and their children, as before mentioned. The trustees were Mr. Sackville, a relation of the late Mr. Denham, a man of considerable talent, and an

intimate friend of the family, and Mr. Hawksworth, an elderly gentleman of great respectability. To each of these were left bequests; and to Mr. Sackville, in particular, the house and surrounding estates.

CHAPTER III.

'Tis safest to begin with a little aversion.

The Rivals.

We must now return to Huntley Park, where we shall find the hour of dinner fast approaching, and the party re-appearing after their dispersion for the business of the toilette. Agnes Morton could not help looking, with some curiosity, round the rooms in search of the object of their previous conversation, but saw, hitherto, none but well known faces. At length the door of an adjoining room was opened, and she saw enter a young man, rather short and fat, with a face of irresistible good humour, and a manner which, with all its oddity, seemed

admirably suited to the person it belonged to. If this was Lacy, she thought the judgment rather too favourable which had commended his good looks; but scarcely had she settled this point than, "Hartley, how are you?" burst at once from several quarters.

"You have been hiding of late," said Mr. Tyrwhitt. "In what part of the world were you to be seen?"

"Seen! I hardly know," said the character; "I saw myself in the glass every morning—but you would hardly have found any thing like me there." Then, moving on towards Lady Appleby, he uttered a good deal of laughable nonsense in the form of messages, which he pretended that Mrs. Hartley had charged him to deliver.

"I am glad," said her ladyship, "that you have brought Mr. Lacy with you. I hope you have brought him safe and well."

"I hope so, I'm sure," said he, gravely. "I took all possible care of him; I had him labelled with 'glass,' and 'to be kept dry,' and 'this

side uppermost,' which is all one can do for any parcel. I consigned him, with the rest of the luggage, to the care of my people, and I conclude—Oh, here he is."

Agnes was within hearing, and turning as he spoke, saw a young man advance towards them, whose appearance agreeably exceeded her expectations. She also perceived that his exterior was not new to her, and that, without knowing his name, she had often met him in London crowds. She could not tell whether he was tall or short, but she could easily decide the question whether he was plain or handsome. His features were good, even when at rest; but when lighted up with animation, few could refuse to admire them; and to these he added the graces of a manner which it is difficult to define, otherwise than in saying that, to an experienced eye, under any disguise of mean attire, or low association, it would have betrayed at once the gentleman.

"Mr. Lacy," said Lady Appleby, who had

been manufacturing a speech from the moment she saw him enter the room, "I have had great pleasure in receiving from your brother-in-law such excellent accounts of our good friends Sir William and Lady Lacy, who I hear are now enjoying perfect health at their charming place at Lacy Park. I assure you this intelligence is a great compensation for our loss of the expected pleasure of seeing them here; a pleasure on which we had long counted, for it has always been a high satisfaction to Lord Appleby and myself to receive under this roof any member of your family."

Lacy bowed, and smiled.

"Even you—do you understand?" said Hartley, half aloud.

Lacy gave a quick glance to check him; and, controlling a strong disposition to quizzery, which lurked in the twinkling corners of his eyes, took a seat by Lady Appleby, and accommodated himself, with much politeness of attention, to the involutions of that lady's oratory,

until he was relieved by the announcement of dinner.

At table Lacy found himself seated next to Lady Malvern, a lady whom he disliked, and whom he had previously acknowledged merely with a cold bow. There was little disposition on either side to say more than politeness absolutely required: and Lacy, during the first part of the repast, fell considerably in that lady's estimation, by seeming to prefer to her own superior conversation the childish babble of the second Miss Tyrwhitt. The dislike of the Mortons, which he had always been encouraged to entertain, had caused him to see the foibles of Lady Malvern perhaps in rather too strong a light; particularly that affectation of finery, to which he thought she had so little pretension. She had also, on more than one occasion, accosted him with an air of lofty coldness, awkwardly copied from Lady Rodborough, which, though Lacy internally ridiculed, he could not entirely brook. Now that he saw her more

closely, he was more disposed to be amused with her character than angry at her treatment of him. He therefore turned at length to talk to her, and by a happy selection of subjects, and permitting her to enlarge upon the perfections of the Rodborough family, and many dear friends of high consideration, he soon gained a much better place in her good graces than she was ever likely to obtain in his.

Agnes, who sat at some distance, saw with surprise the gradual effect which Lacy's conversation seemed to have in softening the aversion of her sister; and, knowing that she was by no means a skilful dissembler, and could not exhibit much more graciousness than she really felt, she was early induced to rate highly those powers of pleasing which could so soon disarm such strong dislike. While thinking thus, she began to question whether she herself should be won over with equal ease to the side of the enemy, as she then called him. She trusted, not. With all proper modesty and humility, she

could not but be sensible that her own capacity was superior to her sister's, and that she was less liable to be blinded by a few specious, well applied civilities. Indignant, by anticipation, at the prospect of any attempt to invade her judgment by a system of cajolery, she was at that moment predisposed to do infinitely less than justice to any agreeable qualities that she might afterwards discover in Mr. Lacy. Perhaps, at the same time, she was somewhat apprehensive of her own weakness, or she would not have thus meditated a defence before there was any prospect of being assailed.

Lacy, on his part, had not been unobservant, and Agnes quickly caught his eye. Well might his attention rest on her, for in her he saw one possessed of no slight personal advantages. She was just of such a height as to escape the character of a tall person, and had a graceful carriage, and an elegant figure. Though not decidedly a brunette, she partook of that complexion much more than of the blonde. Her

hair was black, her eyes deep blue, her neck and forehead beautifully white; in short, without flattery or exaggeration, she might be pronounced extremely handsome. What wonder, then, if Lacy's looks were turned with admiration towards an object so attractive; or that he watched with interest those sparkling eyes, that beamed with such vivacity and intelligence; or that beautiful mouth, that seemed formed to utter only agreeable things. He soon became curious to know her name, which he had not hitherto ascertained.

Introductions are now in such disuse, and all the members of a party are left so frequently to become acquainted as they can, that this circumstance, considering that, including the ten minutes before dinner, he had not yet passed half an hour in the company of Agnes, will not appear surprising. He therefore asked Lady Malvern, in a low tone, whether the young lady on the other side of the table was any relation of the Tyrwhitts. The communication which

followed gave anything rather than satisfaction; and Lacy internally sighed to think that one who seemed so elegant should be a member of the low-born house of Morton. Lady Malvern, one of whose best points was a great admiration and affection for her sister, increased the force of his unfavourable impressions by various remarks, the chief and very visible object of which was to exhibit Agnes to the best advantage. Lacy remarked, that, though hitherto ignorant of Miss Morton's name, he remembered to have seen her at parties in town.

"Yes," said Lady Malvern, carelessly, "I suppose you may have met her, though she did not go about much. She was seen only at a few places; for, in fact, I always strongly objected to her throwing herself away upon small balls and second rate routs; and there are so many of that description, one is compelled to draw a strict line."

"It is very advisable," said Lacy: "I wish

others would be as strict. It is the only way to check pretension."

"Ah—true, true," added Lady Malvern, little suspecting the double bearing of his remark; "and I must say, that in spite of all the common, vulgar outcry about finery and exclusiveness, I cannot see anything of it myself. I should say there was not enough. It really is quite melancholy to see the creatures that come to Almacks'. How they get there nobody knows. Begging Lady Cheltenham's pardon, I suspect it is partly her fault, and I could not help telling her so once. 'Now, Lady Cheltenham,' I said, 'you are really too good-natured—you won't refuse anybody—as for myself, I am quite afraid of even hinting anything I wish; indeed,' I said, 'you positively must not give Agnes another subscription.' But she only laughed, and told me she could not afford to lose her, for there was a terrible dearth of beauty."

Lady Malvern then went on to describe that lady very accurately, for Lacy's better infor-

mation, little suspecting that he was both an acquaintance and a relation. A knowledge of the latter fact he well knew would have raised him greatly in her opinion, but of that opinion he felt at this moment so regardless, that he did not condescend to tell her. The disgust which he conceived for the silly assumption of Lady Malvern, was now allowed to operate very unjustly to the prejudice of her sister; and Lacy was too early prepared to find in her the same weak fluttering vanity—the same restless ambition to gloss over with borrowed finery the real insignificance of her extraction. He saw great indications of elegance in the appearance of Agnes, and he was somewhat uncharitably disposed to think that this refinement was but tinsel, which would not bear the test of examination, and thinly covered real vulgarity.

Nursed in lofty aristocratic feelings, and carefully encouraged by his father in opinions so flattering to himself, Herbert was inclined to place the prerogative of birth rather higher

than is usual with those who had trodden, like himself, the levelling maze of fashionable society. He had been taught invariably to connect vulgarity with low extraction; and he could not divest himself sufficiently of that impression, or give due weight to the effect and influence of wealth and education, which are alike open to all in this free and enlightened country. The usages of society might have taught him, that if any credentials were now necessary to obtain admission to a London drawing-room, the rent-roll would generally be demanded in preference to the pedigree. But this was a fact to which he had either shut his eyes, or viewed it as a strange and improper anomaly; and as the error flattered his self-love, he had hitherto continued in it. He was in the present instance rather proud of the sturdiness of his principles, in not being dazzled by the outward charms of the grand-daughter of an ironmonger; and never suspected his own illiberality in condemning her unheard because her family had lately risen by

honest industry, and an elder sister, for whose manners she could not be accountable, was a silly, vain, affected woman. Throughout the remainder of the evening, therefore, he studiously preserved this resolute indifference, and never attempted to discover whether the mental graces of Agnes Morton bore any proportion to her personal ones. In fact, several hours had elapsed without their having exchanged a syllable: but there were many other persons to talk to, and the circumstance was probably unknown to all but themselves.

Music was in due time proposed, and Agnes, who was an accomplished musician, sung and played a good deal, and in a style with which Lacy, who had an accurate musical taste, ought to have been much pleased. But Lacy was otherwise disposed. He never even approached her during any of her performances, or ejaculated a single praise, or asked the name of the last song. However, as gentlemen are not compelled by the rules of modern society either

to listen or admire, he could seem perfectly inattentive without any breach of good-breeding. He was in his most fastidious mood, perversely bent upon discovering a tinge of vulgarity in all that Miss Morton said or did. He questioned with himself, whether she did not even sing and play rather too professionally well, and saw in her prompt, unaffected readiness to gratify her friends, only an indelicate fondness for display. It cannot be supposed that, in the mean time, Lacy had gained much ground in the good opinion of Agnes. Her sister had certainly seemed to relax from her repulsiveness during dinner; but she had hitherto uttered nothing in his favour: for though Lady Malvern was now really disposed to like him, she had too great a love of consistency to praise one whom she had so lately thought proper to censure.

Agnes, therefore, saw in Lacy nothing more than a gentlemanly young man, who would not condescend to notice her, and had certainly

shown no taste for music. Of his conversation, as he was seldom near her, she had few opportunities of judging. The chief specimens which she heard were a discussion with Mrs. Poole about the intermarriages and relationships of a set of people she did not know, and a little small talk with Miss Tyrwhitt, which was carefully adapted to the calibre of that young lady's small understanding. Between herself and him nothing passed which deserved the name of conversation. Once it happened that she was asking the name of somebody's place, which those whom she spoke to could not tell her. Lacy supplied the information: she thanked him; and then each turned to talk to some one else; and this was all that was said by each to the other in the whole course of that evening

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CHAPTER IV.

What if he *has* made a ridiculous gimcrack of his house and gardens: you know his heart is set upon it; and could not you commend his taste?

Three Weeks after Marriage.

A mischievous error in education is, that children are plagued with a great deal of useless knowledge, while the most important objects are overlooked.

SPURZHEIM.

It is difficult to say how long Lacy would have preserved this distant demeanor had he not been drawn into a closer communication with Agnes Morton, by an arrangement which was made on the following morning. Lady Appleby and Mrs. Poole had agreed to call upon their common friends the Bingleys, and Agnes had engaged to accompany them. A gentleman was wanted to complete the party, and as her lady-

ship and Mrs. Poole both fixed upon Lacy as the most desirable companion, he was pressed to fill the fourth seat in their barouche.

The party set out; Lady Appleby all civility—Mrs. Poole all good humour—Agnes in cheerful spirits, and Lacy perfectly well disposed *de faire les frais de la conversation.* His fastidious caution of the preceding evening was lost in the animation of the present moment, and he soon found himself undesignedly, and unconsciously talking with lively interest to Agnes. It was greatly in her favour that Lady Malvern was not of the party, for her presence would infallibly have preserved Lacy in that haughty system of circumspection which he had prescribed to himself.

At length, they arrived at Castleglass Abbey, the seat of the Bingleys, a place which, though its name was compounded of Castle and Abbey, had very little of the appearance of either, and in fact was so called only from occupying the site of an ancient monastery. It was a long, low,

Italian villa, in the most recent state of incompleteness, built with verandas, and projecting roofs, and various contrivances to alleviate the intensity of that sun, which in this country so seldom shines, and having an airy unsubstantial character, which was any thing but attractive in that most uncomfortable of all times, a cold day in summer. The situation was but moderately pretty; and the place, which had not at all the character of a show place, was now seen to great disadvantage. It had a raw, unfinished air throughout: on all sides was a great deal that was to be beautiful some time or other, but very little that was so at present. Newly gravelled walks, visible throughout all their curves, twined among large expanses of coarse turf, which was variously chequered with brown diagrams, looking like selections from the Chinese puzzle, that went by the name of flower-beds. Beyond these were extensive red, sandy tracts, where the nakedness of the land was as yet but ill concealed by the small, thirsty-looking

evergreens, which, with due allowance for future growth, were sparingly dotted over it.

They entered the house, which still smelt of paint and whitewash, and were introduced into the presence of Mrs. Bingley. This lady was not very distinguishable from the great mass of good sort of women. Her best quality in society was a disposition to please, and to be pleased: and this is a quality which justly compensates for a very great inferiority of social powers. In Mrs. Bingley, however, a wish to view the bright side of every circumstance, added to a nervous eagerness to be lively and agreeable, sometimes produced results, which closely verged upon the ludicrous. In the present instance, after the first greetings, mutual inquiries took their usual precedence of other conversation.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Bingley, "we are quite well now, but we have been shockingly ill, I assure you. It must have been an epidemic, something contagious in the air, for we all had it—every one. There was Mr. Bingley,

and I, and Edmund, and Jane, and Louisa, and Margaret, and Arthur—we were all ill together—it was so droll !"

She then went on to relate how ludicrously they had been tormented with smoke, and the exquisite joke of having a new white marble chimney-piece spoiled by it. She showed them the stains for their entertainment, and said, with a laugh, that they would never come out. The new house afforded ample matter for conversation; and as all her visitors politely expressed a curiosity respecting its arrangements, so was the lady perfectly ready to gratify them, by a full display of the whole of it. Far from wishing them to receive any thing upon her bare assertion, she insisted upon their seeing all with their own eyes; and leaving Lacy in an unfurnished drawing room, with a roll of plans to entertain him, carried off the ladies, to convince them, by ocular proof, that the bed-rooms were exactly of the number and size which she described.

These inflictions being over, Mr. Bingley

made his appearance, and being assured that his lady had done the honours of the interior, proposed to conduct them through the grounds. This, however, the ladies declined : fatigue, recent rain, thin shoes, and fear of wet, were among the principal excuses, and the hope of another opportunity was held out as a consolation to Mr. Bingley. But there was no such escape for Lacy: he could neither be tired, nor fearful of wet, and could look for no other opportunity. In addition to this, Lady Appleby, whose compliments, by some strange fatality, were generally ill-timed, made frequent appeals to his well known taste, and assured her friends, that the improvements in the approach at Lord Westburn's had been made upon his sole suggestion. He was therefore fastened upon by Mr. Bingley, who professed a great wish to consult his judgment. There was no resisting such an assurance, and Lacy was forced to comply, exchanging with Agnes a look of comic despair, as he was hurried out of the room.

Mr. Bingley was that well known animal, a proser; and in addition to the defect of an incontinence of words, had a considerable want of fluency in the delivery of them. Lacy had a little of his father's susceptibility to annoyances of this nature, and as he was quick in estimating the colloquial powers of his conductor, he soon discovered the disagreeableness of his prospects.

"Ay," said Mr. Bingley, in answer to some civil things which Lacy said as they walked together from the house, "to be sure a great deal has been done, and I only wish that you could see what the place was, before all these improvements were made. It was not like the same thing. That lane, which runs beyond the hedge, near the two large firs in the field yonder, used to run between that sunk fence, and the farthest clump of those three. In the nearest corner of those meadows was an ancient fishpond, now filled up; and the farm buildings, which are now out of sight, behind the edge of the hill to the left, used to stand in the middle

of the lake—it was not a lake then, you understand. Then only look at the land in the valley on each side of the approach—what do you think that used to be? A swamp, Sir, positively a swamp. Well, what did I do?—I set to work and drained it—drained it all on both sides—turned a twenty-inch culvert in the centre of the hollow, and carried my carriage-road right across it. I will tell you a circumstance about that culvert: I had a layer-out of grounds here, a very positive sort of fellow. He was for two feet: I stood up for twenty inches. We argued the point for several days, but at last I succeeded in convincing him that twenty inches would do exactly, and it did do, and it has done: and there is my approach running over the middle of it."

Lacy, anxious to change the subject, then adverted to his house. "You cannot conceive," said Mr. Bingley, "how superior it is to the house I pulled down. I wish you could have seen that house. If I knew where to lay my

hand upon it, I should like to show you the plan of it. I will try if I can get it for you; I think it would entertain you."

"You are very good," said Lacy, "but I should be sorry to give you that trouble. I think I could hardly feel greater interest in your present house, even if I were to see the plan you mention. A good house does not require to be set off by the contrast of a bad one."

Mr. Bingley assented, and forbore to threaten him any longer with the plan. "And now, Sir," said he, taking Lacy by the arm, and carefully placing him in a proper position, "just cast your eyes—ay, there—in that direction, and now tell me your opinion. Does any thing strike you in that view, as admitting of improvement? I wish to profit by your judgment."

'Indeed," said Lacy, after a modest disclaimer of any pretensions to superior judgment, "I hardly know how to suggest anything—the view seems to me to be almost perfect: and it will

soon lose what is perhaps its only blot when that building is gone, which I see you are now pulling down."

"Pulling down! my dear Sir! those people are building it up—that is my new ruin—you don't consider—one must have a ruin—surely you don't object to that!"

"Certainly not," replied Lacy. "It will be quite in character with your other improvements. My only fear was, that it might be rather too much in sight—but I suppose you are going to plant a part of it out."

"Sir, it *is* half planted out already. Why, only look—there, just before—no, I forgot—I beg your pardon—you cannot see the trees from hence—but if you will just step fifty yards further, you will see how judiciously it will be partly concealed," and taking Lacy by the arm, he led him to the spot, where he detained him no little time with a minute dissertation upon ruins.

Lacy's stock of patience was now almost

exhausted, yet he still continued to listen to his companion with a tolerable air of attention. He also tried to quicken his progress by his own ready comprehension. But it was in vain that Lacy displayed his ingenuity in anticipating the explanations of Mr. Bingley; for, as habitual stammerers are notoriously unwilling to accept the assistance of those who are content with half a sentence, or volunteer to finish it for them, so this gentleman was equally averse to any attempts to relieve his mental hesitation; and after Lacy had briefly expressed what he was going to say, was seldom satisfied without repeating the same idea in other words. Foiled in this endeavour to shorten his term of penance, Lacy, as a last resource, ventured to intimate that his time was not his own, and that he must attend Lady Appleby. To this Mr. Bingley could offer no objection, though he ventured to throw in his way the last possible impediment by taking him the longest way back.

At length they reached the house, where

they found the ladies anxiously expecting their return. Even Mrs. Poole's current of small talk had begun to fail; and Lady Appleby looked as if she would have found it a great relief to feel at liberty to yawn. Miss Morton looked placid and pretty, but was evidently wearied out of all animation; and Mrs. Bingley, deprived of the resources of locomotion, began to find the entertainment of her guests an irksome task. Unfortunately they declined luncheon; and as she could not set them down to eat, she had been compelled to summon the nursery to her aid, and fill up the time by displaying the various proficiencies of her offspring.

Mrs. Bingley was the mother of five fine children, the eldest about seven years old, all fortunately at hand, and ready to be shown. She was a good mother—that is to say, good with regard to her intentions—very anxious for the welfare of her children, and indefatigable in her attention to them. But she was too san-

guine, and somewhat impatient, had little judgment in the direction of her efforts, and seemed to think that too much of a good thing could never either be done or expected. She had imbibed many wise maxims about teaching youth betimes, and instilling the seeds of early knowledge, all of which she applied rather too forcibly; and bitten with a mania for education, wanted to see her infant flock start up into little men and women, almost as soon as they could walk and talk. She had also that nervous impression, which over anxious mothers are apt to entertain, that nothing relating to them could possibly go on well, except under her immediate eye.

Her whole family, consisting of two boys and three daughters (the youngest a baby in arms), were brought in to be discussed and admired. They made their bows and curtseys at the door, and came forward with their little heads poked up, as if the collar were still at their chins, and the backboard at their shoulders.

"Here," said the mother, introducing Miss Louisa, a little curly-headed thing of four years and a half old; "here is a little lady, who I am afraid likes her dolls better than her books—don't you, Louy?" kissing her.

The visitors exclaimed at her forwardness, and wondered that she should be able to read at all. "Oh, she has been able to read this long time," said Mrs. Bingley; "but I am afraid," she added, looking very grave, "she does not always understand what she reads, and *that* is of the utmost consequence—go, and shut the anti-room door, Louy. She is a quick child," pursued Mrs. Bingley, when she thought Louy was out of hearing, "very quick, but wants application. The fact is, she is too volatile."

"A serious fault at four years old," observed Mrs. Poole.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Bingley, very innocently, "for I am confident, that much depends upon forming the character early. Jane, here," drawing towards her a demure, pretty looking,

child, on the verge of six—"has much more steadiness of character. She is a very good girl, though I wish she showed more taste for music. I tell her every body likes music—how comes it that Jane does not? I dare say Miss Morton likes music—go to that lady, my love, and ask her."

Encouraged by the engaging smile of Agnes, the little musician sidled up to her, asked her the question, and received the required assurance.

"And have you dot a tarryplaster?" said the incredulous child, looking inquiringly in her face.

"Chiroplast, Jane; you must learn to say chiroplast. No, Miss Morton does not want a chiroplast, no more will you, when you can play better. She does not like the chiroplast, ma'am, though she took to it wonderfully at first. I had her taught upon Logier's system; I have spared no pains in giving her an early taste for music. I took her last spring to see

the infant Lyra—I thought it would excite her emulation. Do you remember the little Lyra, Jane? When will you do any thing like that? Only think how well that little girl played upon that great harp!"

"But her harp is not so big as my piano-forte," said the little musician, rather piqued by the comparison.

"True, my love, but she plays it better. Edward, my dear, don't touch that—and do stand straight, or you will grow quite crooked. Come here—hold yourself up, as the soldiers do. We think him very like his father—but you must not pull those faces—you don't look like papa when you do so."

Mrs. Poole and Lady Appleby, nevertheless, professed themselves much struck with the likeness to Mr. Bingley. Agnes could not find it out, and avoided the question, by inquiring Master Edmund's age.

"Seven, next month," said Mrs. Bingley. "We think of sending him soon to school—

Mr. Bingley wishes it—I am sure it is more than I do—for I dare say he will not learn so much as at home.—In fact, it is my plan to be always teaching them some little thing, and not to let an hour slip without putting something into their heads, and by all means to give them a habit of asking questions. Edmund was asking me this morning about the weather-glass: why it falls in rainy weather.—Do you remember, Edmund? Why does the glass fall?"

"It is not the glass, it is the quicksilver as falls," said Master Edmund, with the matured confidence of seven years old.

"'*As* falls!' *that* falls. Mind your English.—And what makes the quicksilver fall?"

"The weight of the air," said the young philosopher.

"Very well remembered, Edmund. You see"—turning to her visitors, "you see the nature of my system. There is no doing children proper justice without being constantly *at* them."

At this moment the nurse entered to summon the children to their dinner; and they were reluctantly dismissed by their admiring parent, though not without receiving her parting directions to make their obeisances in due form, and mind how they went out of the room. The little girls grasped their frocks, and dropped their retiring curtseys, at the imminent danger of tumbling backwards; and Master Edmund striding out sideways, to the full extent of one of his short legs, drew the other after it; then, after lowering his head to his knees, as if he were going to throw a summerset, regained once more an upright posture, and sidled out of the room according to directions, without turning his back on the company. Soon after this, the gentlemen returned, and the visit was at length concluded.

"What a sweet woman Mrs. Bingley is!" said Lady Appleby, on her way homewards, "and what astonishing pains she takes with her children!"

"Lord! poor things!" exclaimed Mrs. Poole, "I think she overworks them sadly — I was quite sorry for the poor children. I dare say, as she says, she is always *at* them—I hate to see people so strict and particular, and cramming children so shockingly early. It is well, perhaps, that I have none, for if I had, I am afraid I should spoil them. I am fond of giving them a little indulgence—are not you, Miss Morton?"

"Of the two extremes," said Agnes, "I probably should prefer indulgence. Severity, however, does not seem to be the faulty part of Mrs. Bingley's system. Her foible is rather that of being too anxious and attentive, and expecting more than is natural and necessary."

"I should not care," said Mrs. Poole, "how little was learnt, at that very early age."

"I will not go quite that length," replied Agnes. "I should certainly wish them to learn something; but I should think it was of more consequence to attend to their dispositions, and

give them correct notions of right and wrong. I should be rather afraid of encouraging a feeling of rivalry. It would make them learn more; but it would be at the risk of injuring their tempers."

"Yes, I hate rivalry," pursued Mrs. Poole, "and also the system of showing them off—I am sure it must make them conceited. Children must be dull indeed if they don't get a high opinion of their own importance, from seeing themselves so much attended to. They will soon learn to fancy that they are entitled to more notice than they have any right to expect. Did you ever see such a self-sufficient little old man of a child, as they have made of Lord Langley, Lord and Lady Brereton's little boy? They have drilled, and crammed, and be-praised, and be-tutored the poor child, till he thinks himself as great as a prince of the blood."

"Like the little German Duke of R——," added Lacy, "who observed, with some surprise, that an old officer, who had come to see

him, was not embarrassed in his presence. But, Mrs. Poole, I don't think this self-sufficiency comes merely from over-tutoring. You will find, I dare say, many an ignorant child just as conceited as one that has been *crammed* from his cradle. However, I quite agree with what Miss Morton was saying about rivalry; and as for early prodigies, I suspect that they are of little use but to gratify the vanity of parents and teachers."

"Very likely," said Miss Morton; "but it is an amiable kind of vanity, and one should not treat it very severely."

Lacy assented, and with a look of more genuine approbation than he had hitherto bestowed upon her. He had been pleased with the simple tone of unaffected good sense, which her observations had evinced. The subject was by no means such as young men and young ladies, generally, discuss; and the style of the conversation had much more of a didactic character, than is often suffered to prevail. Perhaps, how-

ever, it had not the less effect on that account. Men are generally disposed to give ample credit to the other sex, for the possession of vivacity and a competent portion of the graces; but clear, natural good sense is a less obvious quality, and is therefore more prized by them, when unostentatiously displayed. Having broken the ice, Lacy talked a good deal to Agnes; was much pleased and amused with her remarks; and found himself irresistibly impressed with a very favourable opinion of her mental endowments.

CHAPTER V.

Why should I call 'em fools? The world thinks better of 'em; for these have quality, and education, wit, and fine conversation, and are received and admired by the world. If not, they like and admire themselves; and why is not that true wisdom?

CONGREVE.

THE first step towards the removal of dislike, is at once the most difficult and the most effectual, and this being taken, no other than a favourable result could be anticipated. But the prejudices of Lacy were as yet only softened, not disarmed; and though he could not refuse to acknowledge the beauty of Agnes, he was far from being a willing admirer. He was ready to admit that she was clever, lively, sensible, and observant. To her disposition he was hitherto a stranger, and he easily allowed himself to think, that she might be deficient in

liberality and good nature. Though he had been amused by her remarks, he was inclined to quarrel with her quick perception of the ridiculous, and thought he perceived a greater tendency to satire, than accorded with his *beau ideal* of female propriety.

He might, however, have observed, had he been willing to be otherwise than censorious, that her satire was always light and playful, and that she was ever a willing advocate when an absent person was wantonly assailed. He might also have observed, that even where she had no sufficient grounds for an actual defence, her good nature would often lead her to attempt, by delicate and well-timed pleasantry, to blunt and divert the sallies of a ridicule which she considered too severe. Lacy, however, was naturally both observant and candid; and whatever were his prepossessions, was not likely to struggle long against conviction. A wet day came opportunely to favour his acquaintance with Miss Morton.

Nothing drives a party at a house in the country more completely to their resources than rain. To kill time soon became an important object, and various were the means devised. Music and billiards had their turn; some went to play at battledore and shuttlecock in the hall; others beguiled the hours in ransacking albums and portfolios. Mr. Tyrwhitt, in despair, proposed *écarté;* and one of his sisters suggested that they should act charades; but these amusements were voted to be better resources for the evening. Some of the ladies worked a little, and some of the gentlemen tried to be useful; one helped to unravel silk, and another delivered his opinion upon colours and patterns.

Luncheon came at last, and a great resource it was; for there was change of place and something to do. But the employment of eating was of short duration; and then, after lounging about the rooms of the principal *suite*, they were all at length re-assembled in the long gallery

library, which, both in the morning and evening, was the principal place of rendezvous. They soon became variously employed. In the opposite corners of the same sofa sat Lady Appleby making a purse, and Lady Malvern reading a novel. Lord Malvern, the only person who seemed really busy, was writing at a distant table; and his Lordship of Appleby fast asleep with a newspaper on his knee. Mr. Tyrwhitt was teaching a poodle to walk upon his hind legs; Mrs. Poole and Miss Tyrwhitt enlivening themselves with a noisy game at backgammon; and Hartley sitting near, inventing paragraphs for their amusement, and making cross-readings in the newspaper. Lacy was alternately occupied in talking, reading, drawing caricatures on the back of a letter he had just received, and watching the proceedings of Agnes, who was replacing some broken harp-strings.

More was done than said, till the occupations of most of the party came at once to a conclu-

sion. The noise of the dice and back-gammon men ceased; the novel was laid down; the harp was strung and tuned; and those who were lately so busy, seemed all at once inclined to find their best resource in conversation.

"Who knows anything of the Norton theatricals?" said Mrs. Poole, first breaking the silence. "Mr. Lacy, you were last there."

"I have had an account to-day," said Lacy. "The last event was a laughable tragedy—a complete chapter of accidents—Richard's hump slipped under his arm—Lady Anne put him in bodily fear, by her awkward manner of pretending to stab him; and Henry Slingsby, who played Buckingham, threw all into utter confusion, by repeating, not only his part, but his cues."

"Lord!" said Mrs. Poole, "what could they expect when they made that creature act in a tragedy! He has not a serious thought about him. I must say, I like him nevertheless. His laugh is delightful."

"Yes," said Lady Malvern, with a caustic

air, which she copied from Lady Rodborough, "it is a pity he ever does anything else. I allow that he is an incomparable laugher. Nobody is so amusing at a room's length; but you lose the effect if you hear what he says."

"Ah! you are like me," said Miss Tyrwhitt; "I like laughing for laughing sake."

"I am sure," pursued Lady Malvern, "that in Slingsby's case, it is better to have his laugh without his nonsense."

"Very good, faith!" said Hartley. "Lady Malvern, I am sure you would approve of my friend Congleton's style of proceeding: when he is going to tell what he thinks a good story, he always has his laugh first;—famous good plan that—it does not interfere with any body else's laugh, and you may get out of the way before the story begins. I know most of Congleton's pet jokes—you have no idea what fun it is to watch his manœuvres to bring them to bear. Nobody lays a train better. Poor Miss Cateaton! it was a shame, really—the other day,

under pretence of helping her, he dropped an atlas upon her tender toes, and said that she had had all the world at her feet. I don't think his joke was worth his trouble."

"It was doubly cruel," said Lady Malvern, "to a woman who never had a proposal—which, I am sure, I don't wonder at, though Agnes looks as if she did."

"I certainly do," replied Agnes.

"Then I am sure, my dear Agnes," pursued her sister, "you must have a peculiar talent for wondering. What could any body have seen in that plain, prim, old Miss Cateaton?"

"She was young once, and I should think pretty," said Agnes; "and she must always have been good-humoured and pleasing."

"I am glad you don't say 'pleasant. 'Pleasant' and 'pleasing' are very different—as much as 'amiable' and '*aimable*.' I dare say it is very possible that she may fully deserve the character you give her; but one

expects a great deal more in people that pretend to live in the world. Anything like dowdiness would ruin an angel; if a woman has not fashion, she is quite lost—nothing can save her—the world does not stop to make distinctions."

"Louisa, you are hard upon the poor world," said Agnes, with a smile.

"Oh, I can give you instances," continued Lady Malvern, in the same tone. "Only look at those Lady Hornbys—poor girls! they are pretty, to be sure, though rather in a tame style—and I suppose they may be pleasing. Then they have accomplishments, I am told, though they seldom bring them out with effect. But, after all, they are mere nobodies—they don't get on."

"Or go off, which is more important," said Mrs. Poole.

"No," added Lady Malvern, "and they are never likely—they want fashion—they are not in the first set, or ever will be. And then, poor creatures! where are they seen? They just creep

to Almack's, to help to fill the room on the first two or three nights of the season; and nobody sees them anywhere afterwards. Then, Lord Bewdley, their father, worthy man! thinks of nothing but drill husbandry, and her ladyship of gardening; and they allow themselves to be always surrounded by a set of hum-drum relations. It is very injurious to the girls, in town especially; and I wonder they suffer it."

"They are certainly very kind to their relations," said Agnes, "and I like them for it; and for their independence. They never struggle and manœuvre for introductions and invitations; they never beg, and flatter, and expose themselves to more trouble, and more humiliation too, than society is really worth. I should say of them, that they liked society for its own sake. They have no ambitious feelings of finery and exclusiveness; they go to see those whom they really like, and not to be seen themselves. It always seems to me that there is much more real dignity in their quiet, unosten-

tatious mode of proceeding, than there is in that of many others, who have been always striving to get on, and think themselves entitled to look down upon them."

"Oh, I agree with you," said Mrs. Poole; "I hate *pushing* people—mere fashion is as bad as no fashion. There are the Penleys—look at them; there is an instance of mere fashion. They are people of neither family nor fortune; they have been living *for* the world, and *at* the world, and are always studying effect—laying trains for invitations, and angling for acquaintances. As soon as the labours of the town season are over, they set off to the watering places in search of 'Desirables.' The daughters are fine showy girls, but not quite to my taste; they are what my friend, Lady Ashborne, calls 'laboriously elegant'—so *maniérée*—so dressy—always tricked out with such wonderful care in the newest Frenchifications. But gentlemen are the best judges of ladies. What should you say of them, Mr. Lacy?"

"What one might say of most Frenchwomen," replied Lacy, "that they look like figures stepping out of the leaves of the 'Journal des Modes.' I hope they would take my remark as a compliment."

"I would not be sure of that," said Hartley. "They have never forgiven me for asking whether they communicate with their Paris milliner by telegraphs or carrier pigeons."

"I think you are all rather severe upon the Miss Penleys," said Agnes. "I won't try to defend them against the shocking imputation of being always too well dressed. I am afraid they are guilty, and, of course, they must bear the dreadful consequences. Perhaps, too, they may seem rather *maniérée*—that I allow—but I don't think they are really affected."

"*Maniérée*, and not affected!" interrupted Lady Malvern. "Nay, Agnes, have some pity for my weak comprehension; I cannot understand such fine distinctions. Pray, enlighten me. What is the difference?"

"There is almost as much," said Agnes, with a smile, "as you lately made out between 'pleasant' and 'pleasing.'"

"A fair retort," said Lady Malvern, "though not an explanation. But you cannot say that the Penleys are not pushing, manœuvring people. I don't know, otherwise, how you will account for their having got on so well."

"They are agreeable," said Agnes, "and the daughters handsome, and that must account for a great deal."

"Perhaps so," replied Lady Malvern; "but that does not excuse their being such inveterate match-hunters. They are always cruising after a good 'partie;' always thinking of an establishment."

"And never succeeding," said Mrs. Poole.

"And yet," observed Agnes, "they are said to be able manœuvrers, and to make this their principal object. I think their not succeeding ought almost to acquit them."

"Well, Agnes," resumed Lady Malvern,

"we won't attack them any longer. But I cannot like them, and never did since I heard them so be-praised by that odious Lady Dartford. By the bye, Mrs. Poole, how dreadfully Lady Dartford plays! Did you hear what she lost one evening, about a fortnight ago, at Brighton?"

"My dear Louisa!" exclaimed Agnes, in a tone of expostulation.

"Twelve hundred pounds in the course of an evening," continued Lady Malvern, not attending.

"Nay," said Agnes, "let me give you all the particulars; I am much more circumstantial. Report tells me that the pounds were guineas, and that she was obliged to leave in pledge her watch, her rings, a fan, and a smelling bottle."

"Foolish girl! Agnes only says this to discredit the story. The fact is, Mrs. Poole, that she won't hear any thing against Lady Dartford, though she must know her passion for play."

"Well," replied Agnes, "I believe I must bear witness against her. I have seen her wonderfully eager at cards, even when she was playing for the merest trifle. I particularly remember her once losing two sovereigns at loo, and I assure you that in my opinion she bore her loss extremely ill."

Lacy smiled, and showed, by the look which he directed towards Agnes, that he appreciated her mode of defence. "Miss Morton," said he, a moment afterwards, "you will encourage me to attack your friends for the pleasure of hearing you defend them."

Good nature (in its more enlarged and nobler sense) is so bright an ornament in a youthful female mind—an ornament for the want of which no brilliancy can compensate—that, in as much as Lacy had at first decided that, without this quality, he never could admire Miss Morton, so did he, upon discovering that she really possessed it, begin to like her much better than, three days before, he would have

considered possible. This change in his opinion soon betrayed itself in a corresponding change of manner; and, instead of the distant coldness which he at first constrained himself to observe, he now evinced an interest, an attention, which was not unnoticed by Agnes, and could hardly fail to be in some degree flattering.

The following day produced an accession to the party at Huntley, in the persons of Lord Midhurst, son of the Earl of Skipton, and his friend Mr. Luscombe. Lacy was acquainted with both, and looked forward to the coming of the former with some curiosity and interest. It was not that he cared much about him, individually; but his attention had been excited by a circumstance which occurred the day before. Lady Appleby happened to mention that she expected Lord Midhurst, and, as she said this, Lacy observed that Lady Malvern directed a very significant look of satisfaction towards her sister, who, on meeting her eye, smiled, blushed, and turned away. From these short glances it was

easy to collect that Lady Malvern believed Lord Midhurst to be an admirer of her sister, of which Agnes seemed not unconscious; and her ladyship's air of pleasure shewed that she drew favourable auguries from their approaching interview. Lacy also considered Lord Midhurst to be one who, if matrimonially disposed, and not satisfied with mere flirtation, was not likely to sue in vain. He was good looking and good humoured; a young man of great expectations, lively spirits, frank address, and manners of the world. He was not, however, either clever or well informed; had few pretensions to wit himself, and rarely perceived it in others. Nevertheless, he contrived to fill, very creditably, the character of an "agreeable rattle," and was thought by many to be entertaining. He was quick and vivacious; and, by dint of letting his tongue run unrestrained, sometimes blurted out a good thing. His taste embraced sports of almost every description. Of those which come under the title of ac-

complishments, dancing alone he liked, from its sociability and gaiety: in music and painting he was a perfect Goth. With books, even of the lightest kind, he had not much acquaintance; indeed, as he said "he had no time for them." He was gay, jovial, light hearted, and thoughtless; had a tolerably correct impression of right and wrong; and, though he possessed not quite the self-denial of an anchorite, could make small sacrifices with a pretty good grace; and was, when unbiassed by bad example, commendably disposed to do what was right.

Lord Midhurst's companion, Mr. Luscombe, was a gentleman now on the verge of forty; but who, in spite of the visible ravages of tell-tale Time, still endeavoured to affect the stripling, always joined the most youthful group in company, and danced and prattled with very young ladies, with all the zest of one-and-twenty. He was a person very slightly endowed with the advantages either of birth, fortune, talents, or appearance; and who owed his success in

society chiefly to his good humour, and to a certain ductility of character which enabled his acquaintance to mould him easily to their will. He was a pattern of utility and compliance: no person served more purposes, or served them with greater willingness. He was always useful to fill a gap in a party, and to help to make things go off well: was set at the end of the table when the lady of the house retired to the side; would either tell a story himself, or be the subject of another's; could make a fourth at whist, when wanted; knew when to press a lady to the instrument; and was invaluable to dance with little misses at their first ball. Above all things, he was an inimitable butt; for he not only patiently received the gibes of his assailants, but invited their attacks by seeming to enjoy them. He understood a joke well; knew both how to laugh, and to listen; and had sufficient tact to abstain from wearying any one with his own discourse. He did a little of every thing tolerably ill, and was consequently an useful

foil upon most occasions. The awkward squad of a shooting party would generally make bold to bet that they would kill more game than Luscombe; and bad indeed must be the billiard player, whom he did not put in good spirits. In short, he was one of those passive persons, who seem to fill in modern society a similar situation to that, which was formerly borne by the court fool in the establishments of feudal princes.

Of these two new visitors, Lord Midhurst excited the greater share of Lacy's attention, from the ardent admiration, which he instantly displayed for Agnes Morton. Lacy had now an opportunity of seeing that lady in a new light, and in so doing, he felt an interest, which, on consideration, startled and surprised him; and he wondered at his own curiosity in watching the progress of a flirtation, in which he was so little concerned.

Agnes received the very evident homage of her admirer, with great ease and composure,

and laughed and talked with perfect willingness, but with that unconcern that evinced no thought either of attracting or repelling. Lacy would have approved of her manner, if he could have thought it natural: but this he would not allow, and viewed it only as the result of practice and design. He became angry with Agnes, for shewing herself so finished a coquette, little suspecting that nothing but a slight degree of jealousy in his own breast, could ever have suggested such an idea. He also began to augur ill of her taste and understanding, in being so much entertained with such a mere chatterer as Lord Midhurst.

Love, which unseals the lips of all, had made his lordship more than usually voluble. "It was very cruel in you," said he, "to leave town so terribly early. It grew so stupid after you went!"

"Then I seem to have left it at the right time," said Agnes.

"No, faith! you must not say that, for it was

not stupid to every body—only to me. Upon my honour, when you were gone, I grew so dull and melancholy, that if you had seen me, you would not have known me. They used to quiz me dreadfully. A friend of mine came up to me in the Park, and asked me on what day I meant to shoot myself."

"How very severe!" said Agnes, laughing. "Do tell me your friend's name, that I may know whom I ought to be afraid of."

"Nay, that is too good, upon my honour," said Lord Midhurst: "he ought to be afraid of you. You know *you* can be very severe. You ladies always beat us men in *that.* But I like people to be severe. I wish you had stayed in town, to have been at the Wharton's *déjeûné.* You never saw such a woe-begone business. It rained all day, as if it had never rained before. Half the people looked so hazy! as if the fog had got into their faces. It was altogether capital fun; I never enjoyed myself more. Then, afterwards,

we had a fancy ball—uncommonly good that was too. What character do you think I went in?"

"A sombre one, I hope; for it would have been extremely painful to affect a cheerfulness that you did not feel."

"Ah! now, really that is too bad—cruel, faith, to remind a man of his misfortunes; for all that time, I was the most miserable dog on the face of the earth, seriously, without joking."

"Without joking! That I conclude. Miserable people seldom joke."

Much more passed in the same strain, Lord Midhurst talking on, with heedless, blundering vivacity, and Agnes playfully unravelling his inconsistencies.

Lacy, though amused, was not altogether satisfied. He thought that Agnes appeared to take a greater pleasure in the conversation and attentions of her admirer, than was quite consistent with what, he knew, must be her real estimate of his understanding. He thought her vanity was flattered by his homage, and that she was

pleased with an opportunity of displaying her conquest. In conversation with Lord Midhurst, she also seemed to exhibit a careless familiarity with the scenes and characters of fashionable life, which Lacy thought less real than affected; and which seemed to hold out claims to importance, which he was rather disposed to deride.

"It is truly a pity," said he to himself, "that one of such beauty, elegance, and talent, is so little sensible of the ridicule to which she exposes herself, by this vulgar aspiration, after a station and consequence, which her extraction must deny her."

These reflections recalled, in some degree, his first feeling of dislike; and, unconscious of any undue arrogance in himself, he began to wish that such false pride might have a fall, and even took an uncharitable pleasure in the prospect of Miss Morton's receiving some signal mortification.

CHAPTER VI.

Une froideur, ou une incivilité, que vient de ceux qui sont au dessus de nous, nous les fait haïr; mais un salut ou un sourire nous les reconcilie.

BRUYERE.

HITHERTO we have heard nothing of Lord Appleby. At this, however, let nobody be surprised, for he was not a person much calculated to attract attention any where, though decidedly more conspicuous in his own house than in any other. He was inoffensive, mild, and amiable. His chief merit in society was that of being a perfect gentleman: his countervailing demerits, vanity and dulness. His conversation was languid and common place; and its only approach to piquancy, consisted in a querulous tone of sickly fastidiousness. His vanity was

of a harmless kind, which few refused to humour, and was chiefly displayed in an overweaning admiration of every thing that belonged to himself. His place, house, books, pictures, whatever he had, was infinitely better than any body else could possibly possess; while, at the same time, he disclaimed receiving from them any positive pleasure, and always lamented the trouble and vexation which they entailed upon him.

On the following morning, Lacy was indulging him with a few civil comments upon the beauties of Huntley, and complimenting him upon his liberality, in throwing it open to the inspection of the curious.

"Mr. Lacy," said his lordship, inwardly delighted with the subject, but looking the picture of misery and disgust; "never have a show house. I assure you, having tried it, that the plague, and the nuisance, and the annoyance, and the trouble, are something perfectly inconceivable. Day after day, people

come, and they are admitted; and in they walk, and away they ramble through your rooms, and go where you will, there you meet them. As I say, for the time being, you are not master of your own house; your house, as I say, is not your own: you are not master of your own house. It is indeed a serious drawback from the trifling satisfaction of having things that are considered worth seeing."

Lacy assented; but said that it must be very gratifying to think that he had the means of giving so much pleasure, and, perhaps, of improving the taste of his visitors.

" Ah, yes—very true—it ought to be gratifying, of course; though I must honestly confess that I do it rather as a duty than as any source of gratification. I have tried to remedy the evil by restricting admission to certain days—but all in vain; it would not do—the throng of applicants was too great. " You see," he observed, pointing out two carriages which appeared in a distant part of the ap-

proach, "a case in point—see how we are pestered. I shall just have time before they arrive to show you the picture I was mentioning," and so saying, taking Lacy by the arm, he led him into another room.

Meanwhile the carriages approached, and at length drew up before the door. The first was a substantial travelling coach, which was closely followed by a hack chaise. Both belonged to the same party, which, on being landed from their vehicles, appeared to consist of a stout middle aged gentleman, and his plump wife, three slim young ladies, and a tall slip of a boy. Their motions were observed from the window of the room which Lacy and Lord Appleby had just quitted, and in which remained only Lady Malvern and her sister, of whom the former, hearing that they were not visitors of the family, and judging them vulgar from the air of their equipage, thought she might safely indulge in the pleasure of a stare.

"What beings!" she exclaimed, as she

watched them getting out of their carriage. "Agnes, do come and look at them—those tawdry girls! and the old people—quite as good—staring about them, I declare, as if they had never seen such a house before; and now he looks this way—good heavens! it is—no—yes, it certainly is ——"

"Who?" said Agnes, approaching the window.

"Look!" said Lady Malvern, in a tone of alarm.

"Yes," replied Agnes, "there is no mistaking them. I see they are our cousins, the Bagshawes."

"Hush!" said her ladyship; "come away, Agnes," and she looked suspiciously round the room to see if any one was near. "Take no notice," she added, in a low tone.

Agnes looked at her with surprise. "I think I hardly understand you. Do you mean that I should take notice of *them*?"

"Yes, to be sure I did—why need you?

—Surely you don't intend to go out and see them?"

"I do, indeed."

"Then, Agnes, you will disoblige me," said Lady Malvern, walking away from her rather proudly.

"I should be sorry to do that," replied Agnes; "but I hope, Louisa, it will not be so; for I think you must acknowledge the propriety of paying some attention to such near relations."

"They are not such *very* near relations; besides, it is their being related that makes the difficulty. You know what beings they are—one can never acknowledge them to the Applebys, and Lord Midhurst, and all that party."

"I have no scruples on that point," replied Agnes, calmly. "Besides, Louisa, you should remember that we are under obligations to them, which I could never forgive myself for neglecting to repay. You know how kind they were some time ago, before your marriage, when you all had the scarlet fever. *You* re-

ceived particular attention; I am sure you would not be ungrateful."

A self-reproving blush came over Lady Malvern's countenance.

"Oh, I am sure I am quite sensible that what they did was very kind, and I shall always say so. But what good can we do by going out to see them now? *That* would be a very poor return."

"I allow that it would. We should do them no real good, it is true, but we should give them pleasure, at any rate.

"I don't know that. I dare say they had rather look over the house at their ease, without being put out of the way by us. You know they are all in their travelling deshabille: our presence would only distress them. Besides, if we keep quiet they will never know that we were here."

"I am not sure of that," said Agnes; "I think they saw us. But, whether they did or not, I should equally reproach myself for having treated them unkindly."

"See them, by all means," said Lady Malvern; "but do not draw me into seeing them too: one of the family surely is enough."

"No," said Agnes; "if I see them, you must; or else the neglect on your side will undo all the pleasure arising from any civility that I can show. There is no use in hanging back: the relationship must be known. I feel their vulgarity as strongly as you can, but I know that they are worthy people; and, as for their manners, we must take them as we find them;" and, so saying, putting her arm within her sister's, she walked with her out of the room.

Mrs. Bagshawe was the first cousin of Mr. Morton, being the daughter of his father's elder brother, who, as he had risen less in affluence, had not been enabled to give equal refinement to his descendants. Mrs. Bagshawe was a good-hearted, but ignorant and vulgar woman, and had now been many years the wife of a respectable London attorney, who, without much ability, had, by dint of industry, and a character

for punctuality and integrity, amassed a comfortable fortune. In fact, he felt himself sufficiently wealthy to take frequent relaxations from his professional labours, and to indulge himself and family with a little pleasure-hunting in the summer. Such was their present object. They had been at Cheltenham, and were going to the Lakes, and stopped in their way to view the beauties of Huntley Park. They had got into the first room of the show suite, had obtained catalogues and an attendant, and had asked a few questions, when a door was opened, and in walked Lady Malvern and Miss Morton. There was much real surprise on the part of the Bagshawes, which was answered by a little well affected astonishment from Lady Malvern, who chose to prevent her attention from being too overpowering, by pretending to stumble upon them unawares. The office, therefore, of setting both parties more at their ease, seemed to devolve upon Agnes, who greeted them all with much cordiality.

Lady Malvern stiffly bent her head, coldly said that she was glad to meet them, and made languid inquiries respecting their healths and arrangements. The Bagshawes, at first, could think of nothing but the happy chance which brought them together.

"So strange and so lucky as it is, to be sure," said Mrs. Bagshawe, "that we and your ladyship should just be coming to look at this place at the same time! It is odd we didn't meet on the road."

Lady Malvern informed her, with a smile of superiority, that they were staying there on a visit.

"Indeed! I am sure I ask your pardon," said Mrs. Bagshawe, with rather a puzzled look of astonishment, as if she now comprehended, for the first time, that show houses were made to be lived in. A pause ensued; and Mr. Bagshawe, a fat, prim, civil looking man, with a ludicrous assumption of courtliness in his manner, smirked, threw his short body

into various contortions, and with a little impressive shake of the head, politely hoped the Viscount was well.

"If you mean Lord Malvern," said her ladyship, "he is very well. He is here too."

"And the Earl and Countess of Rodborough," pursued Mr. Bagshawe, who was determined to do the "civil thing" effectually: "they, I trust, are also enjoying that health which all must wish them. I hope the Earl has not suffered from his long and strict attention to the duties of the House of Lords?"

Lady Malvern bowed her head, and murmured something not very intelligible.

"It must be a great satisfaction to his lordship," Mr. Bagshawe proceeded, "after having ably fulfilled his senatorial duties, to revisit once more his native wilds, if I may be allowed the expression, in alluding to his splendid seat at Westcourt. How delightful to find himself in that dignified retirement, that happy union of

ease and grandeur which, I must confess, is most truly enviable."

Here Mr. Bagshawe suddenly stopped; not for lack of words, for he was prepared to have spun out the sentence to double its length; or of inclination, for he thought himself a fine talker, and, like most persons of that persuasion, loved to hear himself speak; but he was arrested by the abrupt leave which Lady Malvern took of them, while, as she walked away, Lord Appleby made his appearance at another door.

Agnes was hurt at the uncivil suddenness of her sister's departure, and resolved to repair it by staying with the Bagshawes, and undergoing the penance of accompanying them through the rooms The unpleasantness of her situation was increased by the sudden entrance of Lord Appleby, who, finding himself in the same room, and seeing that they were friends of hers, advanced towards them with the civil intention of paying his personal respects, at the same time looking at Agnes in a way that shewed

his expectation that she would perform the ceremony of an introduction. This was accordingly done, and Agnes then hoped that, after a few bows, and a few more words on either side, the conference would be ended.

But Mr. Bagshawe, pleased with such a dignified accession to his acquaintance, and anxious to acquit himself of a flourishing eulogium, which lay ready on his tongue's end, after a prefatory hem, and a glance round the room, addressed his lordship in a style which foreboded anything rather than a brief interview.

"Your walls, my lord," said he, waving his hand, "are well filled with food for the eye of taste. I must confess I was not prepared for such a banquet as your lordship spreads before your visitors. I was told that I should be dazzled; but my expectations are quite exceeded, and I hope I may be allowed to congratulate your lordship on the possession of this noble, indeed I may say, this peerless collection."

The beautiful appropriateness of this speech was, in a great measure, lost upon Lord Appleby: but without reflecting that his eulogist had not yet seen more than a small and inferior part of the collection which he so warmly commended, he perceived that praise and admiration were the objects of his address, and with these, however administered, he was always disposed to be satisfied. He had a keen perception of vulgarity, and a pride which usually shrunk from the contamination of its approach: but his pride was less active than his vanity; and in order to gratify the latter with flattery, even of so broad and clumsy a description, he condescended, from pure good-nature, as he thought, to prolong his civilities to the Bagshawes. He smiled, frowned, shrugged his shoulders, raised his eyebrows, allowed that he had some good things, and then, affecting an air of fastidious indifference, vouchsafed to point out some of the objects which were most worthy of their attention.

"There is a picture," said he, pointing to a small Correggio, "which I am not sorry to have got. I imported it myself. No one knows," he added, shaking his head, with a piteous look, "no one knows the trouble, and the money, and what not, which that small picture cost me—not more than I thought it was worth; but more, I verily believe, than any other picture I have."

"Only think! such a small one as it is!" exclaimed Mrs. Bagshawe, measuring it with her eye, and looking from it, with surprise, to a gigantic Sneyders which hung above.

"Quite a gem!" said Mr. Bagshawe, who had gathered from the lips of Christie and Phillips, a few choice specimens of the phraseology of the auction room. "A very capital bit of the master, and in a remarkably fine condition. Your lordship deserves the thanks of the country for securing us such a treasure. Correggio is very scarce, my lord; we don't see him every day. In good preservation he

is invaluable. Money can hardly buy him pure."

Lord Appleby made a grave inclination of assent, his better taste beginning to take a slight alarm at the professional tone of his visitor's remarks, and he directed his attention somewhat impatiently to another picture.

"Uncommon fine, indeed, my lord!" exclaimed Mr. Bagshawe. "The air of the head is beautiful—so flowing!—so—and then, what a depth! What a—look at it, my dear. Mrs. B., my lord, is fond of the arts as well as I. We have all our little turn that way. Only look at it, my dear; see what a breadth there is about it! I never saw such a breadth in my life!"

"It is not so broad as the picture next to it," said the lady, very innocently, and in an under tone, as if to correct her husband's mistake. Lord Appleby heard the remark, and the well-bred corners of his mouth, exhibited, for a moment, the least possible disposition to smile. Mr. Bagshawe frowned at his wife, and fid-

getted across the room. "Ha!" said he, glad to change the subject, "an old acquaintance, I perceive. I saw the original of this at Milan. It is really a very perfect copy."

A cloud passed over Lord Appleby's brow at mention of the word "copy," and he felt as only a collector can feel.

"I never hang up copies," he replied, suppressing with a laudable effort, his generous glow of indignation. "This is a *duplicate*, if you will; but equally original with the picture at Milan. Oh, you shall be convinced, Sir," said he, to the humbled and apologizing Mr. Bagshawe, who was backing out of the scrape, with all the cumbrous dexterity of a well-trained dray-horse, "you shall be convinced: you shall take nothing on my bare assertion. I will show you a remarkable variation, that, in my humble opinion, is quite conclusive. Look at the right foot of the left hand figure; on that foot are six toes. Now, Sir, I ask you, as a judge of painting, would a servile copyist have

done that? would any but the easy, negligent hand of the master? Impossible, every way impossible. That sixth toe decides the question."

Mr. Bagshawe hastened to repair his error by promptly assenting to his lordship's remark, and assured him, that the sixth toe was a hundred pounds in the picture's way in any auction room in London. But Lord Appleby, although appeased, had, by this time, seen quite enough of the party; for though he could have borne with the technical admiration of Mr. Bagshawe, he was greatly disgusted with the rest of the family. Poor Mrs. Bagshawe he set down for an ignoramus: the girls had giggled too much at the toe, and had been shamefully inattentive to all the higher objects of curiosity. As for the son, a gawky, semi-dandified youth, in the debateable age between boyhood and manhood, who seemed thoroughly *gêné* with his padded coat and stiff cravat, and who, to the discomfiture of his lordship's nervous system,

had kept up an incessant tattoo with a small switch upon the side of his boot; his only audible remark that had any reference to the pictures, was once, when, after cocking his eye at a large hunting piece by Sneyders, he observed to one of his sisters, that the hindermost dog had "a cross of the bull."

This remark contributed, among other things, to accelerate the departure of his lordship, who was seriously wounded by any thing that attacked the credit of his pictures; who had too much politeness to vent his contempt, and too much pride to stoop to correct the misconceptions of the junior branches of this hopeful family. He, therefore, with a gracious inclination of the head, and a circling look that wandered from the Bagshawes to Agnes, hoped that her friends would receive every gratification which his collection could afford, and to her great relief withdrew.

Scarcely was the door closed, when the Bagshawes began their comments upon Lord Ap-

pleby. Mrs. Bagshawe said he was an elegant man and had not an ounce of pride about him. Miss Bagshawe remarked, with much discrimination, that though he was not much of a beau now, he looked as if he had been one; while her sisters evinced much surprise that a lord who lived in such a fine house should wear such a shabby watch-ribbon. Dick, the son, made no remark; but his father supplied his deficiencies by entering at large into the character of Lord Appleby.

"I am extremely well satisfied with his lordship," said he. "He is a truly agreeable man, Miss Morton, and a gentlemanly man, and a sensible man, and a man of a fine mind. I feel to understand his character as well as if I had known him all my life. A little blind—allow me to say it—a little blind on a certain subject," looking significantly at the pictures; "for, between ourselves," speaking almost in a whisper, though there was no one near by whom he feared to be overheard; "between ourselves,

there is a deal of rubbish in this collection, things for which I would not give *that*," with a contemptuous snap of the fingers; "far from genuine, I assure you, though here and there is a pretty bit. I hope," he added, with a complacent smile at the recollection of his own address, "you did not think that I went too far in humouring his lordship's foible? I saw he liked a little praise, which I was careful to administer. This was one of those cases, Miss Morton, when it is allowable to scatter dust in a great man's eyes."

Agnes smiled, partly at the awkward vanity of her relation, who flattered himself that he had played the courtier with success, and partly through amusement at hearing Lord Appleby seriously called a great man. She felt acutely the vulgarity of her relations, and saw all the ridicule that their awkwardness and pretension must excite in any of the well-bred inmates of the house, no others of whom she devoutly hoped might cross their path. Above all she

dreaded lest they should encounter the eye of Lacy; for whose opinion she had already begun to conceive much respect, and among whose qualities she observed a great quickness to the detection of absurdities. She felt much uneasiness in the anticipation of his meeting them, as she contemplated the groupe before her. There was squab, puffy Mr. Bagshawe, with his perked-up head, and important strut; his dowdy wife, whom a rich pelisse strove in vain to render lady-like, with her hot, homely face, and dusty bonnet; the priggish apprentice-like cub of a son; the three girls in ill-chosen finery, soiled by the journey, the two youngest minutely inspecting the furniture, while the eldest affected a languid air of sovereign disregard for everything around her.

While engaged in this review, Agnes heard approaching footsteps in the next room, and thought, with horror, that they were those of Lacy. Her worst apprehensions were verified; for in another instant he appeared. The room

they were in, was a passage room, which he was obliged to traverse in order to join his party at the other side of the house; and she consoled herself with thinking that there was no probability that he would do more than walk hastily through it. She perceived, however, that his eye, on entering, rapidly surveyed the groupe with that air of satisfaction, with which an adept at quizzing always seizes a good subject; and this caused her no slight uneasiness. It was, indeed, a critical moment. Mrs. Bagshawe was extracting from her pocket a collection of biscuits wrapped up in whitey-brown paper: the second girl was measuring with her fingers, the breadth of the lace on the window curtain; while the youngest was peeping at a handsome footstool under the sofa. The son, stationed opposite a pier glass, had just perceived, to his infinite horror, that by incautiously fingering his cravat, he had left imprinted on it in many a dusty stain, the marks of his new yellow gloves; and Mr. Bagshawe, with one eye shut, and a roll of

paper applied to the other, was examining a picture, and walking backwards to try the effect at different distances.

It was at this moment that Lacy, after a short look of astonishment at finding Agnes with such a party, attempted to pass behind Mr. Bagshawe. The space was small, the obstructions of furniture numerous as usual, Lacy's attention much divided, and our unsuspicious connoisseur, absorbed in the contemplation of higher objects, steadily continuing his retrograde course. The consequence was that few steps were taken, on either side, before the parties came into contact. Straightway each started back, and a thousand pardons were begged in an instant. Exclamations, and somewhat of a giggle, escaped from Mrs. and the Misses Bagshawe. Agnes could not restrain a smile, though rather uneasy at the addition of any circumstance which could help to swell Lacy's budget of ridicule.

But slight, indeed, was her horror *then*, com-

pared with that which she experienced a moment after, when each gentleman, on recovering from his surprise, exchanged a look of recognition: "Mr. Bagshawe, I believe," and "Ha! Mr. Lacy," escaped severally from their lips, and before another second could elapse, they had actually shaken hands.

Conversation now became unavoidable. It commenced with inquiries from Mr. Bagshawe respecting the circumstances of their rencontre, and exclamations of surprise at his good fortune, in meeting at once so many friends.

"So many friends!" repeated Lacy to himself, and stole an inquiring glance at Agnes, who was then talking to Miss Bagshawe, and did not notice his appealing look.

"Mrs. B., Mr. Lacy, my dear, that was so civil to me abroad," said Mr. Bagshawe to his wife, rushing, with bustling eagerness, into the business of introduction. "Mr. Lacy, Mrs. Bagshawe; our junior branches," pointing to his family, "my daughters; my son Richard, our

eldest hope—all come to view the house. You met me last, Sir, on a foreign tour, you now meet me on a home tour—a curious coincidence. The fact is, we have been at Cheltenham and are now on our way to the Lakes. It is our usual practice, Mr. Lacy, to go somewhere every year."

Here Mrs. Bagshawe chimed in with a declaration that a little *outing* did them all a world of good.

"Yes," pursued her husband, eagerly translating her simple meaning into his more ostentatious phraseology; "we derive much benefit from our excursions, benefit both to our minds and bodies, as I sometimes observe to Mrs. B. Depend upon it there is nothing like travelling. Was not it Dr. Johnson, Sir, who said there was no pleasure in life like moving rapidly in a post-chaise?"

Lacy assented.

"*We* came in our own carriage," said Mrs. Bagshawe, who feared lest any misconception

should arise from her husband's quotation in praise of a humbler mode of conveyance.

"True, my dear, so we did. A noble mansion, this, Mr. Lacy, and worthy of a noble owner. I have just been talking to his lordship. His lordship did us the honour to pass through here and point out one or two of the pictures that were most worthy of our attention." He then proceeded to enlarge upon the subject of Lord Appleby, his house, and his collection, repeating by the way many of the remarks which he had previously made to Agnes.

Much of this dissertation was, however, lost upon Lacy, whose thoughts had been otherwise diverted by hearing the word "cousin" applied to Agnes by Miss Bagshawe, and from that moment he had been attentive to the conversation of the two young ladies. Knowing the humble origin of the Mortons, it caused in him no great surprise to find that Agnes was related to vulgar people; yet still the contrast between

their inelegance and her refinement was such as to create a momentary shock. He felt also some curiosity to see how she would conduct herself under circumstances so humiliating.

During the conversation between Lacy and Mr. Bagshawe, Agnes had endeavoured to point out to her cousins those objects which she thought most likely to amuse them. But Miss Bagshawe, with a silly, half-bred affectation, sometimes seeming to assume an air of superior taste, sometimes disclaiming all pretensions to any, disdained to be amused with any thing she saw around her, and tried to establish her pretensions to vivacity and worldly knowledge, by detailing some watering-place tittle-tattle, and chattering about balls and concerts. Her manner had become more affected since the appearance of Lacy, whose favourable notice she could not help wishing to attract. She was good looking, and might even have been admired if she could have let herself alone, and not, by dint of striving to be over mannerly, spoiled the effect of

all that nature had done in her behalf. She tossed her head, rolled her eyes, giggled laboriously at nothing, and could not walk across the room without such multifarious contortions! such glidings, and sinkings, and sailings, and divings! all which Lacy's quick eye had unsparingly observed, and his suppressed smile of ridicule was, to Agnes, sufficiently intelligible.

Had the object been an indifferent person, she might have been equally amused; but in the present instance she felt distressed for her cousin, who was quite incapable of perceiving the ridicule to which she exposed herself.

All the shame which Agnes felt for Miss Bagshawe, and still more, did this young lady feel for the childish manners and simple curiosity of her younger sisters, who, being perfectly natural, conveyed no similar impression to the minds of Agnes or of Lacy. Vulgar minds are often most accessible to the feelings of false shame, and Miss Bagshawe was constantly in agonies at the hoydenish *naïveté* of Misses Lucy

and Arabella, who, unrestrained by the presence of Lacy, chattered unreservedly, and attacked Agnes with frequent questions, as, how old Lady Appleby was? how much the Miss Tyrwhitts spent in dress? whether they lived all the year upon venison? and whether the carpet upon which they were then walking was a Turkey one?

"What *can* it signify," said Miss Bagshawe, in a reproving tone; then, turning to Agnes, "I assure you, cousin, I am not at all curious about the Applebys. They tell me," lowering her voice, "that Mr. T., the heir, is not by any means agreeable, at least that was what I heard at Cheltenham. Apropos, of *that* I ought to tell you that we have been very gay there. It really is the sweetest place! I am sure if you had been there you would rave about it. There is such an immense deal of visiting! and *that* you like, I know you do; I am sure you are rather a rake at heart. We had assemblies every week; and the country about it is all so

lovely; and we used to take such charming *rides* in our new open carriage."

"It is a barouche landau," said Miss Lucy.

"Well, child, I am not a coachmaker, nor my cousin either. Do learn to express yourself properly. Such charming rides we used to take! Oh, and we saw so many people that we knew! Yes, and we heard of you too," said she, looking significantly; "there were many pressing inquiries made after you, I assure you, by a certain gentleman that shall be nameless."

"Poor gentleman," said Agnes, "why must he be nameless?"

"La, cousin! how can you?" said Miss Bagshawe, surprised at her composure, and disappointed in the expectation of rallying her into a silly display of coquettish embarrassment. "I am sure you must know whom I mean, a very old flirt of yours."

"Very old is he? I am sure I don't know, but I am prepared to feel a great respect for him."

"Nay, but he is a young man."

"Oh, I beg his pardon: a young man but an old flirt."

"Now are not you dying to know his name?" pursued Miss Bagshawe, vexed at having her intimation so calmly received. "I am sure you must be curious."'

"I shall not object to your telling me."

"Well, then," whispering, "Major Chatterley."

"Oh! Major Chatterley," repeated Agnes, aloud, without exhibiting more emotion at the explosion of this secret, than if a four-legged puppy had been the subject of their conversation.

Nevertheless she was much annoyed at her cousin's ill-bred tone of raillery, and the more so, as she was conscious that every syllable was heard by Lacy. She had, however, too much native dignity of feeling to allow herself to be disconcerted, and too much firm command of temper, to manifest, by word or look, the min-

gled feelings of vexation which she experienced during the visit. Her annoyance had been greatest, and she had to struggle most earnestly against the suggestions of wounded pride, during the period of Lacy's presence. She had already witnessed instances of the quickness with which he seized a subject for ridicule, and at the same time the ancient grudge between their houses had perhaps rendered her fearful of lowering her dignity in his eyes. Besides she knew his aristocratic prejudices, and probable contempt of her low connections; and added to all this was a growing solicitude for his good opinion, which could not perhaps be traced to any of the above-mentioned causes, and of which she became conscious for the first time.

Little, however, need she have feared lest her association with the Bagshawes should have lowered her in the estimation of Lacy. On the contrary, it had dispelled many of the impressions which he had allowed himself to entertain. He had thought her a deceptive being, tricked

out in forced refinement, which, not being of natural growth, would fade away under the influence of untoward situation. He had now seen her undergo an ordeal quite as severe as his harshest wishes could have anticipated, and she had risen superior from the trial. Her unpretending frankness and kindness of manner, towards beings whom she must secretly despise, her cheerful endeavour to accommodate herself to their uncongenial natures, her unconscious superiority, displayed in spite of herself, in every word and gesture, all struck Lacy very forcibly; and when he considered the contrast between the affected graces of Miss Bagshawe, and the unstudied elegance of Agnes, he was hurt to think that he should have been led by prejudice to imagine, for an instant, that one particle of vulgarity could have existed in such a being. His eyes were suddenly opened; a mist had been dispelled, and he found that he had leaped at once from prejudice to admiration.

Meanwhile, the Bagshawes were departing:

but the trials of Agnes were not yet ended, though their greatest bitterness had ceased when Lacy quitted their party. It seemed as if the Bagshawes were destined to pass in review before every person whom that house contained; for, in the entrance-hall, as if purposely to witness their ceremonious leave-taking, were Lord Midhurst, Mr. Luscombe, and one or two others. Agnes also had to answer several loud inquiries from her cousins, respecting the names of these gentlemen, which she doubted not they must have heard. Then followed a debate, carried on in a sonorous whisper, which hissed most audibly through the hall, about the extent of the douceur which it would be proper to give to the attendant, and upon which important point, Agnes was entreated to decide. Then burst forth a loud rude giggle from the Misses Bagshawe and Master Richard, on detecting "Pa," who was inadvertently carrying off, in his pocket, a catalogue of the pictures, which he was civilly informed by the servant in

waiting, he was not allowed to take out of the house.

At last they got to their carriage, and after much time consumed in arranging baskets of provisions, and settling who should sit backwards, to the great relief of Agnes, they kissed their hands to her, and departed.

CHAPTER VII.

Perfections meeting in divers persons cannot choose but find one another, and delight in that they find; for likeness of manners is likely in season to draw liking with affection.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

ALL the party assembled at Huntley had tact enough to understand that relations so little refined as the Bagshawes, would not afford an agreeable topic either to Lady Malvern or Miss Morton, and they therefore prudently abstained from any further mention of them. This consideration sealed the lips of Lacy, though he longed to hear what Agnes would say of them; and he was agreeably surprised when, without any appearance of restraint, she voluntarily introduced the subject.

"I hope," said she, "you will not think me

too inquisitive, if I ask how you became acquainted with my relation, Mr. Bagshawe. He mentioned something of services rendered him by you abroad."

"They were scarcely worth recalling," replied Lacy. "Last year I met him at Milan. He had lost his way, and could not muster sufficient Italian to ask it; and I assisted him to the extent of my local knowledge, for which he was extremely grateful. He seems a good humoured, well meaning man. I had no idea that he was related to your family."

"Very likely," replied Agnes; "but I suppose the discovery has not caused you much surprise. You know we can lay no claim to high descent. Our family tree is but a sapling."

"If the fruit of a tree is good, we should not regard its age," said Lacy.

Agnes acknowledged with a smile, and a slight inclination of the head, the complimentary tone of the observation, and added, "You

are perhaps aware that we owe our rise to industry, and we have, therefore, no right to set up airs of superiority over those of our connections, who have been only less early in profiting by the same advantages. Aristocratic feelings of hauteur, even if they are ever perfectly commendable, are certainly misplaced in those who have so little claim to them."

Lacy made no reply to this observation, and thought it better to recur to what she had said previously.

"You said," pursued he, "that I could not have been surprised at the discovery of your relationship. Why will you do yourself such an injustice? In fact I was very much surprised at finding you in the midst of such a groupe. I do not mean to undervalue them. I can easily believe that they are very estimable people; but they belong to a class of society which must be totally unsuited to your habits. You can have nothing in common with them."

"To be honest," said she, "there are cir-

cumstances under which I feel very strongly the awkwardness of the association; but this is only when they are taken out of the sphere which best suits them. Place me with them in their domestic circle, where everything was natural and unconstrained, and, as a painter would say, 'in keeping,' and I could enter easily, and with interest, into all they thought, and did, and said; nay, I could take a pleasure in their company. Don't suppose that any part of the pleasure would consist in laughing at them: *that* would be uncharitable; and, besides, I could not laugh at them *there*. People are seldom ridiculous, unless when taken out of their proper station, or when their vanity makes them strive to appear what they are not."

"And is this the case with any of the party we saw this morning?"

"It is rather malicious in you to ask me a question that I am sure you can so well answer yourself. Yes, I cannot acquit them all. Mr. Bagshawe rather too much affects *virtù*, and a

pretty mode of expressing himself; but in other respects, when there is no immediate call for display, is a well judging, right hearted man. The eldest daughter is a little *maniéré*—at least before company, though a quiet, good girl at home. In fact, she has seen just enough of society to spoil her a little, and not enough to do her good. As to the rest of the family, I never feel much disposed to smile at *them*—they are so perfectly natural—they show you so plainly what they are, and seem to have no wish to pass for anything more. To be sure I am sometimes a little amused with Mrs. Bagshawe's misconceptions; but she would never be guilty of them, if she was not taken out of her element. People to be thoroughly ridiculous must be either affected or misplaced. If I could by possibility meet my relations, the Bagshawes, at Almack's, I dare say I should feel ashamed of them, though nevertheless I should be angry at myself for such a feeling. It is a very unamiable species of false shame."

Lacy assented to her opinion, and regarded her with a look of admiration. He was thinking how vain was the fear that any association with vulgarity should attach ridicule to her. Agnes herself did not observe his look, and seemed, for an instant, absorbed in thought.

"You will think," continued she, after a short pause, with a faint smile, and colouring slightly, "that I have been talking in a strange blunt manner about my relations. I know no subject upon which people in general are more reserved. I promise you, Mr. Lacy, that if you had not known something of them previously, I would not have lectured upon them to you so freely as I have done—but I——" she stopped. She was going to add what she felt would have been too flattering to Lacy, and would have looked too much like encouragement. Lacy, however, would not allow the pleasing assurance to be lost.

"I flatter myself," said he, "you hoped that I should not abuse your confidence."

"Of course, I *hoped* so," she answered, with a slight blush.

"And won't you say you thought so?" he added, in a tone of more tender expostulation than he had ever used to her before.

"Why, really," replied she, with a laugh which had in it somewhat of effort, "I can hardly say less, after having known you so long —though, I am forgetting myself, when I say I hope you will not abuse my *confidence*, for I have said nothing you may not repeat—nothing you need remember to forget—not even the shadow of a secret. I was only going to apologize for troubling you with this long discussion upon family subjects in such a chattering fit of unreserve."

"Pray don't apologize," replied Lacy; "you don't know how much I am obliged to you for it."

He paused awhile, and then added. "I am afraid you think that I am a lover of reserve—that I am one who can take no interest in the concerns of any of his neighbours. We mix

little with them, it is true, but it does not necessarily follow, that this should proceed from a morose disposition, or from any want of kindly feeling."

"No," replied Agnes, "such an inference might be very unjust—though, at the same time, I dare say you will allow that it would not be improbable."

"Of that, I am aware," said Lacy; "and I am therefore the more anxious to avoid its consequences—one is not secure from censure by living to one's self—sins of omission are punished quite as severely as any others."

Agnes made no reply. The conversation was taking a course which it became difficult to follow; besides, she was sensible that if there had been faults of omission on the part of the Lacys, there had been a corresponding want of neighbourly kindness in her own family; and as she could not confess to Lacy the extent of their prejudices against him, his candour could not safely be imitated.

Both were silent for a short time. Lacy looked down, while Agnes watched his countenance, as if expecting what was to follow. That countenance underwent frequent changes, and was sometimes grave, then brightened for an instant, bearing, at the same time, an air of perplexity, as if thoughts were passing across his mind which he feared, and yet longed to express. At length, however, he looked up, and assuming a gay and careless manner, as if to conceal the seriousness of his meditations, added, with a laugh,—

"I was thinking, Miss Morton, how singular it is that, living as we do in the same neighbourhood, we should have been such perfect strangers till within these few last days—even luck seems to have been against me—in the country, particularly, it has so happened, that on no public occasions have we ever met."

"Certainly, chance has generally been against us: but you must remember, at the same time, that my public life has not been a

very long one; and during half of that time you, I believe, have been abroad. You were in Italy six months ago?"

"I was," said he, his countenance brightening; "but how came you to know that? for I am not so notorious a personage as to expect to find strangers perfectly acquainted with my petty proceedings."

"Perhaps you are not aware," said Agnes, "that I am intimately connected with a friend of yours—that I am the ward of Mr. Sackville."

This was a fact with which Lacy was unacquainted. He knew that Sackville was a friend of the Mortons, had some property left him by Mrs. Denham, and, he believed, was her executor; but with these circumstances he troubled himself very little; and as he was not curious in investigating the minutia of other people's money concerns, and Sackville never talked on the subject, his ignorance may be easily accounted for. Lacy confessed his unconsciousness of this fact, and Agnes gratified his curiosity

by briefly explaining it: after which, they proceeded to speak of their mutual acquaintance, Mr. Sackville. Lacy praised him with much warmth.

"I can hardly name the person," he said, "whom I so much admire and like. He is so clever, and yet so unassuming; so entertaining as a companion; so friendly and engaging in his manner; so truly a man of the world, in its best sense, quick, intelligent, and, at the same time, so warm and single-hearted!"

Agnes did not seem to participate in the generous ardour of his praise, but coldly asked, whether his acquaintance with Mr. Sackville had been of long standing.

"No," replied Lacy, "but time is no sure criterion of intimacy—one knows some persons better in a month than others in a year. With none did I ever become acquainted more rapidly than with Sackville. We seemed to like and understand each other from the first moment—and then, he is so frank and open! Some people

wrap themselves up in mystery, but Sackville is one of those whose character one sees at once."

Agnes made no answer; but as she looked at Lacy, an incredulous smile was seen to play about her mouth.

"You don't agree with me?" said Lacy, who had observed the smile.

"Not exactly," she replied, with some hesitation. "I don't mean to disparage your penetration: but I question whether Mr. Sackville is so easily fathomed by everybody."

"May I ask what is *your* opinion of him?"

"I think that he is a very agreeable person, and has a great deal of talent and address."

"Which means, that you think him rather artful."

Agnes did not contradict the assertion.

"But," pursued Lacy, "that is not his general character."

"If it were, I should say that he did not deserve it. That would be a clumsy sort of artfulness which everybody could perceive."

Lacy admitted the force of the remark, and asked if she could give any instances of artfulness in Sackville.

"I should be an undutiful ward if I did," replied she; "but I am not obliged to say that I *will not*, for the truth is, I *cannot*. Mr. Sackville is not one of those who furnish occasion for stories to be told about them."

"I am sorry for him," said Lacy, "for I see that he has not your good opinion."

"Do not suppose *that*," she replied. "I know few persons to whom he is not in most respects superior. I believe, I was only remarking upon him out of a spirit of opposition, because I thought you praised him overmuch."

"I have good reasons for praising him, and warmly, too," said Lacy; "perhaps you do not know how much I owe him?"

Agnes assured him that she did.

"It is a debt," continued Lacy, "which I can never either forget or repay. You might, perhaps, be amused at my awkward manner of

loading my friend with every virtue under heaven: but I cannot feel that I have exceeded; how can I say too much for one who has done so much for me?"

"Really," said Agnes, "with all due respect for grateful feelings, I do not see why an obligation of that kind should blind one to a friend's faults. Accident put it in Mr. Sackville's power to save your life: I suppose he is a good swimmer (I believe he excels in most things), and probably did this without much risk to himself. I dare say he would have done the same for any drowning person. Now, don't be shocked at me for talking so—you know *I* am not the person obliged. I may reason about it as coolly as I please. All I mean is, that though one is apt to run away with an idea of the greatness of this sort of chance obligation, yet it ought not, in reality, to make one feel half so grateful as many a little premeditated kindness that is suffered to pass almost unnoticed."

Lacy acknowledged the truth of the remark

"But," said he, "whether one bestows one's gratitude right or wrong, I think it is better not to reason ourselves out of any part of the little (too little) that we are apt to show."

"Ah, yes," said Agnes, looking grave; "it is you that are in the right. My foolish distinctions had better have been spared. But, in fact," pursued she, with some hesitation of manner, "I spoke, because—in short I thought—I mean, that a sense of obligation may sometimes involve—may bind—really," said she, colouring deeply, and trying to laugh, "I am a sad awkward person to explain my own meaning. I dare say you will understand it better, without my saying a word more."

Lacy was rather puzzled by her manner. He had not previously suspected that there lurked any hidden meaning that should render explanation necessary. But now her broken words and evident confusion were strangely enigmatical. The truth was, that she wished to guard him against being led by a sense of gratitude to

place himself too much at the disposal and under the power of Sackville. To this she was unconsciously impelled by the increasing interest which she felt for Lacy, and of which she was scarcely sensible, till she came to explain her meaning. Hence her embarrassment; hence, unable to assign a motive, that would not be in some degree flattering to Lacy, she chose to suppress her explanation.

But Lacy, though unable satisfactorily to read her thoughts, at any rate understood sufficient to excite in him, both interest and pleasure. He caught a glimpse of the real cause of her embarrassment—imperfect it was true, but affording sufficient grounds for hope, and great latitude for a favourable interpretation. Fancy is notoriously active in its operations, and in an instant it pictured to the eyes of Lacy, Agnes Morton with all her attractions harbouring for him alone an affection which she could scarcely conceal, and allowing herself incautiously to confess the interest which she felt in

his welfare. How to meet so delightful a disclosure, could be no longer a question, and he was instantly prepared to address her in the language of love. But Agnes, whose delicacy was alarmed by the situation into which she was led, quickly recovering her self-possession, endeavoured to extricate herself, by a prompt alteration of manner, from the imputation of having drawn Lacy into a premature declaration of attachment; so that when he looked up to urge his suit, he saw in her countenance an expression of such resolute reserve, of an indifference so chilling, that his hopes were immediately checked, and the tender sentiment which he was about to express seemed ridiculous and misplaced.

To add to his discomfiture, Lord Midhurst at that moment came up, and throwing himself into a chair by Agnes, and addressing her in a very unsentimental tone of gaiety, seemed to preclude all chance of a speedy resumption of so interesting a subject. But what was worst,

Agnes appeared much pleased at this interruption, entered immediately into conversation with Lord Midhurst, assumed her sprightliest manner, and seemed desirous to drown all recollection of the past, in a copious flow of lively nonsense.

Lacy was mortified : his pride was wounded by her receiving Lord Midhurst's intrusion, as if it were a relief from the irksomeness of a *tête à tête* with him; and he was by this time sufficiently in love to be made very jealous by such a mark of preference. His jealousy, as is usually the case, rendered him unjust; and he quickly settled in his mind, that Agnes was a manœuvring coquette, whose aim it was to play off Lord Midhurst and himself against each other, and thereby make them hasten their advances, and secure a proposal, at least from one. Lacy mentally vowed that it should not be from him; nor did he think that Agnes wished it should. Though himself a good match, he knew that, in the eyes of a

fortune-hunter, he was very inferior to Lord Midhurst, whose proposals to Agnes, Lady Malvern evidently both wished and expected. With that retaliating spirit with which disappointed persons sometimes console themselves under their mortifications, he now set himself to reflect how fortunate it was that he was prevented, by a wealthier suitor, from throwing himself away upon one, who, upon second thoughts, appeared so objectionable as a wife. The coolness existing between the families, which a few hours ago it seemed so delightful to remove, now again presented an insuperable bar. The badness of the connection also appeared to him in glaring colours. The Mortons, if not vulgar themselves, were at any rate related to those who were; and how would the heir of the Lacys endure to have his wife be-cousined by the Bagshawes!

For this feeling of pride he momentarily reproached himself, and remembered the lesson which Agnes had taught him. But then she

had not acquired like him a legitimate right to look down upon the *canaille.* "Though, if they were my relations," he said, "I hope I should behave to them as well as she does; but while the choice is in my power, I may surely be allowed to feel the force of the objection."

Then, after wondering for a while at his own fickleness, in being now reduced to combat, with such earnestness, wishes which he had so lately began to form, he determined to resign all thoughts of Agnes, and contentedly decided that it would be much for the advantage of all parties, that she should bestow herself upon Lord Midhurst.

CHAPTER VIII.

Trincalo. I must tell you a secret, if you'll make much on't.

Armellina. As it deserves. What is it?

Trincalo. I love you, dear morsel of modesty, I love you; and so truly that I'll make you mistress of my thoughts, lady of my revenues, and commit all my moveables into your hands.

Albumazar.

If Lacy flattered himself that he had obtained such a mastery over his feelings, as to wish success to Lord Midhurst, his lordship sincerely thought he had ensured it. This delightful persuasion did not, however, cause him to exhibit many of the characteristics of a fortunate lover. His spirits were too uniformly good to be capable of much improvement without exceeding proper bounds. Abstraction was as foreign to his nature as flying. He was not

a ruminating animal; and though he talked much, it was never to himself. When his mind was full of any subject, he always unburthened it as expeditiously as possible. He therefore had as absolute need of a confidant, as any hero in French tragedy, and his want was amply supplied; for nowhere could he have found one better suited to such an office than his useful friend Jack Luscombe.

"Jack," said he, as they walked homeward from the paddocks, where they had been passing their judgment upon Lord Appleby's racing stud, "what do you think of this Miss Morton?"

"She only wants blood," said Luscombe, whose own escutcheon was not one of the brightest.

"No—and she does not so much want *that*," replied Lord Midhurst, "you know her mother is aunt to Swansea. Her father was low enough to be sure—a blacksmith or locksmith, or some such thing—he or *his* father, I don't know

which. She is bred pretty much like Lichfield's filly, Violante, by Tinker, out of the Duchess."

"And a fine filly that was," said Luscombe, laughing at this elegant allusion.

"And a fine girl Miss Morton is," replied the lover, "and devilish handsome, in my opinion; and I am not the only person who thinks so. There are several I could mention, who think her quite first-rate in point of face. There is Lutterworth—you know Lutterworth? I saw him one night leaning against the wall, in the pit at the Opera; with a glass screwed into his eye, staring away for an hour together. I asked him if he was star-gazing. 'Something pretty much like it,' he said; he had been looking at Miss Morton, and wanted to find out who she was. Luckily for him I happened to know. I had become acquainted a few days before. It was at Almack's, or some such place; and I asked Leicester, who knows the Malverns, if he would introduce me to her. Leicester said,

in his sleepy way, that he would *find* an opportunity. 'Damn it,' I said, 'why cannot you *make* one?' So I made him introduce me at last. I really thought it was time to know her, for I had heard several men admire her, and Bellasys had danced with her, and you know he is great authority, and gives the tone a good deal in these things—so that one hardly could be wrong."

"Why, no—you could not, certainly," said Luscombe, as if he had maturely considered the point.

"No," replied Lord Midhurst; "as you say, one could not be wrong; and then she is not like some girls, that are pretty enough, but then they want a—a certain something—a sort of an air; you understand me; but *she* is so fashionable looking, and has so much style and manner, and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Exactly so," said Mr. Luscombe, settling

his cravat, "they say she has a very good fortune."

"Yes," replied Lord Midhurst, looking more thoughtful than usual, "I believe she has—not that I consider *that* so much an object."

Luscombe looked him full in the face. "Ah, ha, my Lord!" said he, tapping him on the shoulder, "at last I begin to understand you —Matrimony is in the wind."

Lord Midhurst, with a little hesitation, allowed that he had some idea of the kind.

"And a good idea too," said Luscombe. "You know I have often told you you ought to marry. We may all live single if such men as you are not to set us the example. And then, as for the choice you have made, upon my honour, if I may make bold to give my opinion of your intended, I must say I think the lady does infinite credit to your taste."

"Do you think she will have me?" his lord-

ship asked, smiling all the while in conscious security.

" Will she? won't she? that's all. My dear fellow," lowering his voice to a kind of confidential whisper, " the game is in your own hands—you have nothing to do but to propose."

" Haven't I? Well, I hope I haven't. I'll tell you what, Luscombe, I shall rather astonish my friend Lacy. Lacy likes her, I am sure—not that I care for that; the only question is, whether she likes him."

Luscombe smiled, and shook his head, as if he thought the thing impossible.

" You think she does not? so do I, though it is not such a very unlikely thing either. Lacy is a good fellow, and a fairish looking sort of fellow, and thinks himself rather an insinuating style of person, though I think we shall come over him yet. He is not so devilish clever at everything; if it was not for that infernal bad table I could beat him easily

enough at billiards; and, by-the-bye, now I come to think of it, he was quite wrong about the St. Leger."

By this time they had reached the house, and their *tête-à-tête* being interrupted by the accession of others, the conversation was forced to take a different turn. Lord Midhurst was quite as much in earnest as he had given Mr. Luscombe to understand; and from the usual rapidity with which he carried his intentions into effect, it seemed probable that Agnes, ere long, would receive an explicit declaration of his love. Hitherto she had not been conscious of the truth; nor was aware that he had bestowed on her anything more than that vague admiration which he was willing to profess for many others. She had set him down as one of those unsatisfactory persons called "danglers," and had therefore never considered it necessary to express by her manner that air of discouragement which she would have adopted, had she thought that anything serious was intended. Mirth had

hitherto been the prevailing impression with which his society had inspired her: but not one grain of tenderness had ever been associated in her mind with the idea of Lord Midhurst. Probably his lordship was not aware that this was at all necessary to the success of his suit; or, perhaps, he was diffident of his qualifications for playing a sentimental part; or, logically reasoned, that if a smile can touch the heart, *a fortiori* a laugh can win it.

As his passion increased, and his spirits rose, he only laughed and joked the more, and exhibited none of that doubt and anxiety which ought to precede the decision of so eventful a question. In the same mirthful spirit, he seemed to resolve that his proposal should bear, if possible, more the air of a frolic, than of an important compact, on which hung the welfare and happiness of each, for life.

On the morning after his conversation with Luscombe, he lounged about for several hours watching Agnes, in the hope of finding her alone.

No opportunity, however, presented itself, till at length the ladies agreed to walk. Agnes being detained by some occupation which she wished to finish, the rest of the party set out before her. An opportunity now occurred of detaching her from the rest of the company, of which Lord Midhurst, who lay in wait for her near the house, gladly availed himself. Agnes, conscious only that she had not been waited for, and anxious to rejoin her party, was moving quickly along the shrubbery-walk when she heard herself addressed, and, on turning her head, saw Lord Midhurst hastening after her.

"I know who you are looking for," said he, "they are gone round to the other side of the water; you will not easily overtake them; but," added he, observing her look of disappointment, "one of the boats is just below—I can save you a long walk if you will allow me to ferry you across."

To this proposal Agnes acceded, and was accordingly handed into the boat. The lake

(one of the most striking features of Huntley Park) was at this point long and narrow, having more the air of a canal or river than of a lake, and lined on either side with dressed shrubbery. The distance across was very little, and Agnes anticipated a short and easy passage. But, to her surprise, Lord Midhurst, having pushed off the boat, and begun to handle his sculls, instead of rowing straight across, turned directly down the stream. Agnes warned him that he was going wrong.

"I am allowing for the current," said he, looking rather arch.

"But surely," said Agnes, "in that case you would row against the stream, and not with it."

Lord Midhurst burst into a hearty laugh. "I see there is no hoaxing you, Miss Morton. No: the real fact is, there is a better place for landing farther down."

"Thank you," replied Agnes, "but I should have been quite satisfied with the one opposite.

I am afraid I am giving you a great deal of trouble."

"Oh, not at all—I like the row—I hope you are not afraid of trusting yourself to my guidance; I am a very expert person;" and he feathered his sculls with his utmost precision, in order to give her a good opinion of his skill.

Agnes assured him that she did not wish to disparage his boatman-like qualities; and, encouraged by her smile, he made the little vessel shoot merrily through the water, entertaining her, as he plied his sculls, with the humours of a regatta, and the account of a ducking he once had. During this time they had been entering rapidly into wider and deeper water, and were leaving the land and approaching the centre of the lake. Agnes had once or twice interrupted him, to express her opinion of the wrong direction in which he was taking her; but he would not be ruled; and talked, and rowed on, in spite of her remonstrance."

"Pray, Lord Midhurst," said she, at last, "do stop; we are going quite wrong, I assure you."

"Oh, we are right enough," said he, backing his oars, "but I'll stop if you wish it. Perhaps," he added, looking very significant, "you don't know what I came here for."

"No, indeed I do not," replied Agnes, "certainly not to oblige me."

"Why, no," said he, "I hope it would not oblige you; for, in fact, I came here for the convenience of drowning myself."

"Did you indeed?" replied Agnes, quietly. "I am afraid they don't allow the lake to be used for such purposes."

"Don't they? that is unfortunate; but, however, Miss Morton, for your comfort, I am happy to tell you that it is not positively settled that I am to do the uncivil thing by jumping over to feed the fishes, and leaving you to row back alone. Whether I drown myself or

not, will depend upon your answer to a question of mine."

"And what is your question?"

"The same," said he, looking very merrily and cunningly in her face, "that a friend of mine asked a lady I know."

"And what did he ask her?"

"He asked her," said Lord Midhurst, still looking highly amused; "he asked her whether she would have him."

Agnes gave a slight start, and was in some perplexity how to act. However, still doubting whether the whole affair was not a joke, she determined to treat it as such, till she should be convinced of the contrary.

"Really!" she exclaimed with a smile, "and what might the lady's answer be?"

"You must excuse me there," said his lordship, "I want to hear your's."

Agnes again felt much embarrassed; but exerting herself to look composed, and speak with ease and gaiety, "I understand you," she

replied, you are putting a case: "well then, if I were asked such a question, there is no word in the English language I could utter so easily as 'No.'"

"That is because you like to be a little tyrannical in the first instance; but you know you could recal that word as easily as you could say it."

"What I should do in such a case, can signify very little *now*," said Agnes, seriously and firmly. She hoped, by this reply, to remove the uncertainty which at present hung over their conference, and to produce so clear an understanding as should leave her no longer doubtful how to act. It succeeded beyond her expectation, for Lord Midhurst now perceiving that, whether from accident or design, his meaning had not been taken seriously, immediately set himself to act the suitor in good earnest. He had nothing to trust to but the language of the tongue and eyes, for the situation into which he had brought himself, entirely precluded any imposing ele-

gance of attitude or manner. He could neither kneel nor stand without much difficulty and some risk: his hands, the instruments of action, that powerful aid of eloquence, were employed in the management of a pair of sculls, and his position was far from being a graceful one. Seated on a low bench, directly opposite to the lady of his affections, leaning forward on his sculls, his back bent, and toes extended against the stretcher, did he pour forth his tale of love. He told her she was an angel—that he had long suspected it, and been more and more convinced of it every day—that in his opinion she was perfect—that she fully came up to his idea of what a woman ought to be—that hers was the face he always swore by—that his happiness was in her power—that the possession of her hand, was the highest object of his ambition—and that he really could not live without her.

Agnes heard him with a heightened colour, and some agitation, though not with more than, in minds of delicacy, must always attend a

communication of this nature. Her mind, from the commencement of this declaration, had been fully made up, and she availed herself of the first pause in order to reply to him.

"Now, my lord," said she, in as quiet and steady a tone as she could, "I understand you perfectly. When I spoke last, I was doubtful of the seriousness of your intentions. I am very sensible of the honour you do me, and am grateful for your good opinion; and I say this because such an acknowledgment is the only return I can ever make. I cannot conscientiously do otherwise than decline your proposal—nay, my lord, hear me out," said she, as he here endeavoured to interrupt her. "It is on your account, that I am going to add more. You have perhaps a right to know, why I reject your offer. I have never heard any thing to the prejudice of your character; *that* I can say with perfect truth: nor have I seen any thing in your conduct unbefitting a gentleman. But the knowing no harm of a person, is a very weak

reason for accepting him. I am sure we should not suit each other. Our habits, our tastes, our ways of thinking are very different. We should have few sentiments in common; and hence might arise unhappiness to both."

Lord Midhurst here protested that whatever the difference might be (which, for his part, he could not perceive) his tastes and habits should never be allowed to interfere with hers, and that she should enjoy the most perfect liberty and independence.

"You have promised very liberally," replied Agnes; "but I cannot help thinking, that, if independence is a woman's object, she had better remain single. Independence does not coincide with my ideas of what is befitting a wife. Married people should act in concert, and bend to each other's wishes;—but I have no right to be lecturing upon the duties of married life, and I believe I have said enough."

Lord Midhurst here attempted to look heart-broken; and said something about despair,

and being doomed to a single life. "No, my lord, do not say so: that is an old established form of words, which could never have been worse applied than in your case. You will find many, who will suit you better than I should; and I know that you are not unreasonable in your expectations, by your having looked so low."

Lord Midhurst protested against being considered to have looked low, when he aspired to her hand. Agnes cut short his speech as quickly as she could. "Well, well," said she, "I believe I ought not to have spoken so. I must have known the answer it would call forth. Pray let us close the discussion. If I reject you, it is for your own sake, as well as for mine. I am willing to think that you deserve better than to be united to any one, who cannot return your affection. And now, Lord Midhurst, I have only two requests to make: that you will take me back instantly to the place we came from,

and that you will never mention the subject again."

Lord Midhurst was prepared still to expostulate; but there was a dignity and decision in her tone and manner, which made him instantly feel the uselessness and impropriety of saying more. He therefore bowed in token of obedience, and turning his boat, prepared to convey her back again. No part of the preceding conference had been more embarrassing to the feelings of each, than was the silence that ensued. Not a word was uttered by either, and no sound was heard but the measured splash of the sculls, which only served to mark the time, and make it appear longer. Agnes tried to look at the scenery; Lord Midhurst to appear attentive only to his rowing. Each wished the other to speak, but neither liked to begin, or knew exactly what to say. Their recent subject was absolutely dismissed; and no trivial topic of conversation could accord well with their ideas

after one of such interest. Besides, there were feelings of displeasure, which began to arise in the breasts of each. Agnes when she ceased to be absorbed by the actual fact of Lord Midhurst's proposal, began to be rather angry at the manner of it; and thought that this frolicsome style of wooing, evinced very little consideration for her feelings, and showed that, provided he was secure from the possibility of being interrupted in what he said, he little cared how publicly it was made.

Lord Midhurst was also displeased, partly with Agnes, for having rejected him, partly with himself. He now found that the scheme by which he thought to have so cleverly secured an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* had placed him in rather an awkward situation. It was a measure, planned in the ardour of confidence, and was calculated only for successful warfare, as it afforded no means for an unobserved and honourable retreat. To have rowed the lady triumphantly to shore, blushing acknowledgments of

his power over her captive heart, or even coyly intreating to be allowed time to reflect upon his offer, would have been pleasant enough; while, as he homeward plied his sculls, he might have still enforced his suit, or discussed the arrangements for their happy union. But he had never calculated upon the absolute rejection which he had received; and now, to have taken so much trouble for worse than nothing, to have schemed only for the publication of his own defeat, and to be authoritatively told by the somewhat indignant lady, to convey her instantly back again, all this was very mortifying. He had received the just punishment of his overweening confidence: and we doubt not that a galley slave may often have tugged at *his* oar with less uncomfortable feelings, than were those of Lord Midhurst during their short passage to the opposite bank.

But the worst was yet to come. As they approached the side, three gentlemen, who had been, till that instant, concealed from their view

by the shrubs, walked up to assist at the disembarkation. They were Lord Malvern, Huntley, and Lacy, the person of all others, whose observation both Lord Midhurst and Agnes would have most wished at that moment to avoid. Lacy had felt some surprise, and a considerable degree of jealous uneasiness, at seeing her on the water accompanied only by Lord Midhurst. It was a pointed mark of intimacy, which made him sensible, for the moment, how great a pang her marriage would cost him. He, however, struggled against any betrayal of his feelings, and stepping cheerfully on before the others, was foremost with the offer of his hand to help Miss Morton out of the boat. Then he could not but notice her constrained air, her flushed cheek, and the nervous tremour of her hand. Thence it was plain, that the interview had been of an agitating nature. He could gain no immediate intelligence from his observation of Lord Midhurst, who was busying himself, with extraordinary earnestness, in securing

the boat at its moorings, and examining the bottom inside and out, as if he thought he had discovered a leak.

"A neat little boat this," were his first words, spoken in a tone that was not perfectly easy, and without looking any one in the face. "I have just been rowing Miss Morton to that part of the lake where the house looks so well."

Lacy's eye turned towards Agnes at this moment, to see how far she acquiesced in this explanation of their proceedings. He gathered only its refutation from her indignant glance, and the words "You were very obliging," scornfully uttered in a low tone; for Agnes, though anxious to escape observation, did not choose to become an accessary to the equivocation of Lord Midhurst's remark.

Lord Midhurst, who had now no longer any pretence for busying himself about the boat, and was obliged to stand erect, and look about him, could not help seeming vexed and embar-

rassed. Hence Lacy, on whom no indications were lost, plainly inferred that if a proposal had been made, it had not been favourably received by Agnes. The same thoughts appeared to be passing in the minds of Lord Malvern and Huntley, for as the eyes of each met those of Lacy, there was in them a look of consciousness and intelligence, which confirmed each in his opinion. These looks were not unobserved by Agnes and Lord Midhurst, and added considerably to their uneasiness. The latter, evidently ill at ease, sauntered behind, and presently turned away in a different direction to that which the party were pursuing, leaving Agnes to be escorted home by the other gentlemen. She exerted herself to talk; but the exertion was evident, and Lacy perceived that she conversed because she felt herself called upon to say something, and not because it gave her any pleasure. The gentlemen, however curious, politely abstained from all attempt to extort an

explanation of what had passed; and a little sober converse about the scenery of Huntley and other places, was all that ensued during their walk to the house.

CHAPTER IX.

It was the time when Ouse display'd,
His lilies newly blown;
Their beauties I intent surveyed,
And one I wish'd my own.

COWPER.

It soon became known to all at Huntley, that Lord Midhurst had made an unsuccessful proposal to Miss Morton. Agnes very naturally told her sister what had passed, and Lady Malvern, though angry with her for having refused so good an offer, yet as the mischief was done, wisely determined to make the best of it. She was too proud of her sister's having had so rich a prize within her grasp, not to whisper it as a profound secret, to those discreet and trusty matrons, Lady Appleby and Mrs. Poole; and they, as was expected, soon divulged it, under a

similar pledge, to others. Lord Midhurst also chose to be the herald of his own disgrace. Secresy did not enter into the composition of his character, and he could not refrain from imparting his griefs to his friend Luscombe. Luscombe was very properly shocked and surprised at the unaccountable folly of the young lady: but at last suggested, with a view to soothe his companion's wounded vanity, that she might have been engaged to somebody else. Lord Midhurst approved of the idea, and regretted that he had not thought, at the time, of asking her that question.

Lacy owed his information principally to Lord Malvern, with whom he had some conversation on the subject, on the following morning. Lord Malvern was a sensible man, now about eight and twenty. He was grave, quiet, shy, and not a person who brought himself forward, or could excite much attention in any large party. He had the character of being proud, a character often given to reserved persons, and often,

as in the present case, unjustly. Far from being proud, he was only too diffident; and far from asserting his rank, he shrunk from attentions which he always feared were paid rather to his situation than to himself. He liked Lacy, who had the happy art of adapting himself equally to the society of the grave and gay; and Lacy, who was fond of discoveries, liked him because he found in him more talent than he had expected. Lord Malvern, who thought that Lacy would be a very good match for his sister-in-law, and who was not without some idea of promoting it, told him, in confidence, a good deal of what he had gathered from his lady. He also added several encomiums of Agnes, and mentioned traits of character, which tended to raise her still higher in Lacy's estimation, and coincided very agreeably with those favourable impressions which he was now so ready to entertain. Lord Malvern did not seem to regret her rejection of Lord Midhurst, but rather rejoiced at her superiority to all ambitious or

mercenary views, and doubted not that her great merits would eventually ensure her as good a match.

Lord Midhurst took his leave on the day after his rejection. It was not to be expected, with his good spirits and easy temper, that he should exhibit much of the appearance of a disconsolate lover. Nobody, therefore, was much surprised, at seeing how easily he recovered his gaiety. Partly from natural inclination, and partly from the wish of showing Agnes how little he minded her treatment of him, he talked and laughed quite as much as he had done the day before. Agnes, however, was not piqued; she was only relieved from the fear of having given pain, and was confirmed in her sense of the propriety of what she had done, upon receiving such a proof of the weakness of his attachment. He was, however, as little in her thoughts, as could have been expected, and it seemed to her as if she should soon forget both him and his offer.

It was not so with Lacy; the past had made a great impression upon him. His jealousy of Lord Midhurst had been effectually disarmed: he was compelled to acquit Agnes of coquettish manœuvring; and he had received a tacit assurance, that if she were ever brought to accept him, it would be from pure regard, uninfluenced by any mercenary consideration of his being, in point of wealth and station, an eligible match. All his objections, all his prejudices had gradually melted away, and on reviewing her beauty, her elegance, her happy union of lively talents with sweetness of temper, and her unaffected openness and candour, he could not conceal from himself the fact, that he was already very much in love with her, and that he longed for an opportunity of declaring it.

But here, the recollection of Lord Midhurst's late rebuff, taught him a lesson of salutary prudence. Agnes had appeared to distinguish his lordship, quite as much, if not more than himself: why, therefore, should he, who had

received even less of that favourable notice, which might be construed into encouragement, presume to expect success, where a more dignified claimant had been rejected? She might be already attached, nay, engaged to another; and Lord Malvern's confident expectation of her being eventually well-married, though not very clearly expressed, seemed to point to such a circumstance. This consideration was sufficient to render Lacy cautious, and to determine him not to avow his attachment to Miss Morton until he had reason to think, that such an avowal would be favourably received. He watched eagerly, but in vain, for any indication of such an import, throughout the two days succeeding her interview with Lord Midhurst. He even thought that her manner towards him, was more reserved than before. This was the fact, and it arose from an increasing consciousness, that she had been partly influenced in her rejection of Lord Midhurst by a growing preference for Lacy.

This happy truth Lacy would not, in all probability, have soon discovered, but for an accidental circumstance that shortly occurred. The very lake which had been the scene of his rival's discomfiture, also witnessed the elevation ot Lacy's hopes. On a beautiful day, early in August, Agnes, Lady Malvern, and Miss Tyrwhitt, accompanied by Lacy and Hartley, attracted by the clear and cool appearance of the water, were walking leisurely along its edge. A sheet of water is always an agreeable object on a hot summer's day, even to those who have no taste for the picturesque: and in addition to the pleasant associations of coolness and repose which it produced, the present scene was one of no slight beauty. The broad masses of opposite wood were clearly reflected in the lake's still surface, now unruffled by any breeze, but dimpled here and there by fish that rose at flies, and by the swallows which occasionally checked their flight to dip themselves in the water. A few timid wild fowl swimming at a distance,

left, in their wake, a long bright line of light across the dark reflection of the trees; while, closer to the eye, the proud, majestic swan floated indolently down the stream which flowed so gently that he scarcely seemed to move.

The bank, at the place where the party were standing, was rather steep and broken; and they surveyed this tranquil scene from an eminence of many yards above the water's edge. The attention of Agnes was particularly attracted by a fine group of white water-lilies, that were rising from between their broad green leaves near the side.

"How beautiful they are!" she exclaimed, "I wish I had a good little dog, like the poet Cowper's, that went in and brought him the flower he wanted."

"If you will consider me a worthy substitute for the good little dog," said Lacy, "I will try what I can do."

"Thank you, but I should be ashamed of giving you that trouble."

Of course, it was a pleasure rather than a trouble; and Lacy prepared to gratify her wish.

"No, pray don't," continued she: "I don't deserve to be humoured in such a foolish whim. I am like a child that cannot see a pretty thing without wanting to touch it. It is no easy matter—pray don't attempt it."

While she was saying this, Lacy, regardless of her remonstrance, had let himself down the bank, and was at the water's edge, almost within reach of the flower.

"Now, Miss Morton," said Hartley, "I will bet you a pair of gloves that your little dog Lacy does not get you the flower without taking the water after it."

Agnes was too anxiously intent upon watching Lacy to attend to what Hartley said. "Won't you bet?" he added. "Well, you are wise, I am confident he will take the water."

At this instant, a scream from the ladies, and a loud splash from below, showed that he was

right in his opinion. The lilies, when Lacy attempted to reach them, were found to grow at such a distance from the edge, that he could not extend himself far enough to touch them without support from the side, and for this purpose he took hold with one hand of a root that projected out of the bank. While thus hanging over the water, he felt the soil on which he trod give way beneath him, and instant exertion became necessary, in order to regain a firmer footing. In so doing, he gave to the root, now his sole trust, a more violent pull than it would bear. It broke in his hand, and he fell headlong into the water. It was rather deep at that place, and Lacy at the first plunge was totally immersed. With that instinctive exertion which a sense of danger prompts, no sooner had he risen again than he instantly endeavoured to scramble out. But the bank was slippery and steep, and every tussock of grass that he grasped gave way; and at the same time a new enemy appeared, that rendered

his situation rather critical. A swan that had a nest not far off, and was a near spectator of Lacy's proceedings, on witnessing this intrusion into her rightful element, instantly rushed at him, and dealt several sharp blows with her beak and wings. These Lacy fortunately warded from his head, and received upon his arms and shoulders, or the consequences might have been serious. As it was, the struggle seemed of a doubtful character. Lacy, confused by the shock of his sudden immersion, and with his eyes full of water, hardly knew, in the first instance, how he was attacked. He was once more forced under the water, and his situation seemed one of much difficulty.

Hartley, who had laughed at seeing him tumble in, now looked aghast. Lady Malvern, and Miss Tyrwhitt screamed; but it was not only at Lacy's danger, but at seeing Agnes spring alertly down the bank, and place herself within reach of the irritated swan. "Take this," she said, to Lacy, at the same moment,

and threw her closed parasol towards him. Fortunately the swan gave him no opportunity to try the effectiveness of this novel weapon, for startled by the sudden approach of Agnes, it turned round and swam away.

All this took place in a very few seconds. Scarcely was Agnes at the water's edge than Hartley was at her side, and no sooner had the swan retreated, than he was helping her up the bank, and then turned round to give a hand to Lacy, who was now exerting himself successfully to get once more upon dry land. From this time, before one could have counted twenty, they were all together upon the top of the bank, the ladies wondering, and pitying, and lamenting; Lacy and Hartley wondering and laughing, the former almost forgetting how the accident could have originated, and the latter much amused with his appearance.

"Why, you drip like a water spaniel!" said Hartley. "Don't shake yourself near the ladies. Indeed, Miss Morton, it is no joke," for Agnes

gave him a look that seemed to reproach him for his levity. "All creatures shake themselves when they come out of the water. Do, my dear fellow, let me wring you. Why! you have actually lost your waterproof hat!"

"And not performed my errand," said Lacy, looking round at the place where the lilies were.

"Ay," said Hartley; "but it is of no use to go back for the flowers, for you and the swan have destroyed them between you."

"Mr. Lacy," said Agnes, "I will not keep you here shivering in wet clothes to thank you at length for having gone through so much for a whim of mine. You will easily believe that I am greatly obliged."

"You obliged! then what must I be?" said Lacy, and lowering his voice, and coming nearer to her, he added, "I saw that you were the first to assist me."

Gratifying as that recollection was to Lacy, it could not convey more delightful sensations

than did the blush which these few words had raised in Agnes' cheek. "I am sure I could not do less," was her reply, "for it was I that caused it all."

But she could not look at him as she said it; and there was an embarrassed consciousness of having betrayed the favourable state of her sentiments, that gave to her confusion of manner an inexpressible charm in the eyes of Lacy. Her words endeavoured to imply, that she would have done the same for any one in a like situation; but her looks showed, at any rate to the satisfaction of Lacy, that she had been roused to such an act of prompt exertion only by the strong interest which she felt for him. He still held in his hand the parasol which she had given him, and was now about to restore it. In giving it their hands met, and the opportunity of confirming all that his eyes had spoken, by a short, gentle pre sure of hers, was too tempting to be resisted. It was the first time he had ventured so far. She evidently

understood that the pressure was not accidental. She did not withdraw her hand, but she tried to turn away her head, and her lessening colour rose again.

Lacy then turned to the others, and making a few sportive remarks upon his own appearance, hastened from them to the house. His homeward walk afforded a proof of the ascendancy of mental over bodily feelings. He was bareheaded, and drenched with wet, and had received several bruises from the buffets of the swan, and, in short, was in a state of thorough discomfort. Yet never did his spirits feel more buoyant; for the glow of hope and satisfaction with which he was inspired, rendered him quite insensible to the disagreeableness of his situation.

CHAPTER X.

> In love I desire that my desire may be weighed in the balance of honour, and let virtue hold the beam.
>
> SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

RECENT events afforded Lacy ample matter for meditation. He recapitulated to himself all that had been said and done, reviewed the virtues and graces of Agnes Morton, her beauty, her talents, her amiableness, her sense, and, above all, the delightful fact of which he now felt strongly assured, that she had begun to return his affection. This was the happy conviction, but for the absence of which, he would two days back have willingly offered her his hand; and now this assurance was gained. In such a case he could come but to one conclusion,

and the result was a determination to offer himself to Agnes Morton.

Next arose the question, how soon his wishes were to be made known to her; and here was fresh subject for mental debate. Passion prompted an instant avowal: but Lacy, though young and ardent, was no blind slave to the impulse of passion. The fear of a repulse being removed, the prudence which had warned him of the possibility of such an evil, suggested fresh motives for caution and delay. It made him look from himself and Agnes to their respective families, and remember the unpleasant feelings with which they had long regarded each other. He considered that she whom he now wished to marry, was the daughter of parents whom he not only did not know, but of whose ill-will towards him he could not help feeling pre-assured. Even if *their* disinclination to the match should be surmounted, there was still that of his own parents to contend with. Their prejudices against the Mortons

he was now inclined to consider unreasonable; but, unreasonable or not, they were the prejudices of his *parents*, and as such he was bound to respect them. At any rate, it could never be consistent with the duty he owed them, to engage, without their knowledge, in a measure which was sure, in the first instance, to meet with their disapprobation. It was essential, therefore, that a communication should be made to them, and that he should endeavour to forestall their objections, and secure their answer to his arguments, before he took a step of such lasting importance. He would write to them instantly. He would await their reply; and then declare himself to Agnes. He should stay several days longer at Huntley—the Applebys showed a wish to detain him. Agnes would also remain with them another week. He should soon get an answer, and he trusted a favourable one, and all would be settled without his being obliged to depart in uncertainty.

With a mind full of these things, Lacy sat

down to write. He gave a short but eloquent relation of the merits of Agnes, and his own love; and adduced many pointed arguments in favour of a conciliatory line of conduct towards the Mortons. He sat, thus interestingly employed, in his own room, unconscious of the lapse of time, till warned, by his servant, that the party were going in to dinner; and he hurried to the dining-room, which he entered in the wake of the last couple, just too late to secure a seat next to Agnes. He, however, sat opposite to her, and, unless the treacherous lights deceived him, he fancied that when their eyes met he saw her blush. He also flattered himself, that *she* equally regretted his not being near her; thought she was sometimes abstracted; and saw with pleasure that she did not talk much to either of her neighbours.

Nevertheless, he was very impatient for the termination of dinner, that he might rejoin her in the drawing-room, and there enjoy the happiness of being near enough to talk to her

without being heard by all the room. He was also anxious to put his letter in a train for reaching home with speed.

The post at Huntley came in in the evening; and when Lord Appleby re-entered the drawing-room, a large heap of letters was placed before him. His lordship had opened all the envelopes with the methodical solemnity of a man who has little to do, and thinks that little of great importance; and Lacy was walking up to him to solicit a frank, when a letter, taken out of one of the covers addressed to Lord Appleby, was put by him into Lacy's hand. One glance at the direction satisfied Lacy that the letter was from his mother, and he withdrew to a distant table to read it. He was not surprised, or alarmed, or even greatly interested. It was no more than he expected; for he knew that his mother was a great correspondent, and loved writing as much as his father hated it. When we say a *great* correspondent, let it be understood with respect to quantity—of the quality

we shall see more hereafter. We shall, however, be happy to notice any peculiar excellence that may characterize her style. And here, be it observed, that she was distinguished for her emphatic and judicious system of *dashing*; on which account, for the better instruction of those whom it may concern, we shall insert her letter verbatim, premising that the words printed in italics were underlined in the original.

"My Dear Herbert,

"Your father feeling himself unequal to the exertion of *writing*, I take up my pen to do that office *for him*. He has had a pain in the *right* arm, which makes him incapable of writing without uneasiness to *himself*; and, indeed, he has told me that, *at all events*, I should be the *properest* person to break the message to you, though I do not feel *certain* of that, nor do I think that it would have hurt your father to have written *himself*; but in fact he does not *like* the *trouble* of it; and, as you well know his

usual unwillingness to do anything of the kind, I am sure you will not be surprised at this letter coming from *me* instead of *him*.

"We wish *very much* to have you at home again, and for more *reasons* than one. I cannot give you my *authority*, but I am assured by a person who *ought* to know, that there is a *very bad* scarlet fever in the neighbourhood of Huntley Park: and as you know my *horror* of infection, I am sure you will believe the uneasiness which I feel till I know that you are out of *harm's way*, especially as I have *reason* to think that you do not take the *best care* in the world of yourself, as indeed young men don't *always* do, and *you* among the rest. But *this* is not my *only* reason for wishing you at home, for I am desired by your father to say *from him*, that he wishes to see you *immediately* upon *very important business*, which will be better explained by *word of mouth* when you come home, than I can do by letter *now*. I can assure you it is business which very nearly concerns us *all*, but *you* in

particular, and it is the *principal*, and indeed I may say my *only* reason for writing: though at the same time, I would not have you *careless* about the fever, which certainly is in *that neighbourhood*.

"I hear that Mrs. Poole is now at Huntley; ascertain if you can *how long* she will stay there, and *where* she will go *next*. I have my reasons for wishing to know *this*. I rather think, from circumstances, which it is unnecessary to mention *now*, that she will go from thence to the Kingstons.

"There is *a report* that the Ellises have laid down *two* of their carriage horses, and, for the future, will drive only *a pair*. I suppose they find it necessary to retrench. I had a great idea some time ago that they were living a little *too fast*; perhaps, however, it may not be *altogether* true, and they are only *changing* their set, for Jackson tells me that their *leaders* were not very *good ones*; but, at the same time, he has heard nothing of their buying fresh ones *in their stead*.

Perhaps you may hear something about it *where you are.*

"The Dashwoods' carriage passed by yesterday. I strongly suspect that they are going on a visit to the Rodboroughs, at Westcourt, for they were travelling in *that direction*, and they generally visit them once a year, *about this time.*

"You will be glad to hear that your sister's little boy has cut *another* tooth; he is doing very well, though rather *feverish*, as may be expected. She is also going to part with her laundry-maid, which I am *rather sorry* for, for I always thought her a *tidy* person. She wrote to Charles two or three days ago, and, of course, mentioned all this in her letter; but Charles is *so giddy*, that I dare say he never told you any thing about it—Pray remember me kindly to him, and with our united best love, believe me, my dear son, yours, very affectionately,

"CATHERINE LACY."

"P.S. The business I alluded to will not admit of *any delay*; therefore, pray come home

immediately. The Applebys cannot be *offended* at your leaving them abruptly, for you have already staid with them *longer* than you meant *at first.* Pray say every thing that is civil to them from us. *Burn this as soon as you have read it.*"

The first thing that Lacy did, after a short rumination, was to comply with the injunction of the concluding sentence, by committing his letter to the flames. He next sought out Lord and Lady Appleby, and communicated the necessity he was under of going home on the morrow. They were told that business called him thither—heard that he had received a letter from thence—hoped that all were well at Lacy Park, and were just as sorry as the occasion required

The communication to Lady Appleby was made in the hearing of Agnes; and Lacy, who watched her manner of receiving it, saw her look up quickly as he spoke, and then, he thought,

with an air of confusion, glance timidly round, and taking up a book, bend low over the leaves, as if to conceal the expression of her countenance. He judged from her manner, that the intelligence was more important to her feelings than she chose to show; and he was consoled by so thinking. He soon came round to her side, and announced his intended departure.

"Yes, so I heard you tell Lady Appleby," was the whole of her reply, and she went on examining the prints in one of the numbers of Lodge's Portraits. There was nothing soothing in the words themselves; but Lacy rather liked the hurried manner in which they were spoken. This ineffectual effort at composure was just what a parting lover would desire.

Lacy was much mortified at being obliged to quit Huntley so soon: but he saw the necessity, and his decision was quickly formed. He had too high a sense of the duty of filial obedience, to entertain, for an instant, the idea of disregarding the request contained in his mother's

letter; and he could soon add many good reasons of his own for a speedy return. He had been doubting, whether the effect of his written statement would be as satisfactory as he at first supposed; and whether it was not highly expedient that his cause should be pleaded in person. Even then, he began to think that it might be rash to endanger his success by a sudden appeal, before his parents were even brought to regard the Mortons with common charity. The more he considered the case, the more he felt that the result which he desired must be the work of time, and that he must lead them insensibly to entertain a good opinion of their neighbours, before he startled them with the proposal of introducing a daughter of that proscribed house into the family of the Lacys. He also apprehended that some objections might exist on the part of the Mortons, which only time and opportunity would enable him to remove.

In short, he perceived that many difficulties

lay in his path, and was thankful for having been timely saved from the consequences of a precipitate engagement; he must therefore return, and that soon—a longer stay at Huntley would rather retard than further his prospects, the success of which now seemed to depend chiefly upon his conciliatory operations in another quarter. He said little in the course of the evening to Agnes upon the subject of his departure; till, at length, when it grew late, finding her rather apart from the rest, he came up, sat down by her, and said he was going to take leave.

"I set off early in the morning," he said; "I shall not see you after to-night—I do not know when we may meet next."

"You will not be staying at Lacy, then?"

"Yes I shall—and you I hope at Dodswell?"

Agnes smiled assent.

"We shall be near," he said; "it is but six miles. You ride, don't you, when you are at home? Pray don't discontinue it—there are

beautiful rides near us. Perhaps I may sometimes catch a glimpse of you. Would you acknowledge me if we were actually to meet in our unsociable quarter of the world?"

"You can answer that question yourself," replied Agnes, with a blush.

"Yes," said he, "I am sure you would—must you be going? Good night—I am glad I can say *that*—it has a pleasanter sound than 'good bye!' But you must not defraud me of the privileges of leave-taking." Then taking her passive hand, he pressed it, and exchanging one more "good night," they parted.

The next morning before Agnes had appeared at the breakfast-table, Lacy was on his road homeward.

CHAPTER XI.

Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves: for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not.

Measure for Measure.

If Lacy's homeward journey was under a dull, unvarying sky, and through an uninteresting country, his meditations were far from being of the same monotonous character. The alternations of mental cloud and sunshine rapidly succeeded each other, as his mind recurred to the flattering retrospect, or dwelt on the uncertainties of future events. In recollections interesting but fruitless, and in the more useful arrangement of his plans, did he beguile the time, till after several hours spent in travelling,

he found himself entering the lodge gate at Lacy Park.

It was a fine place, ill kept, and conveying, as neglected beauty always does, a feeling of mournfulness. Nothing betokened the existence of hospitality, or care, or much regard for appearances. The tasteful lodge was allowed to be disfigured by a display of household utensils. The road was weedy and ill verged; the grass long, and partially grazed; and nettles and thistles, the tokens rather of bad husbandry, than of an attention to picturesque wildness, were numerously dotted over the ground, on either side of the approach.

These things, though familiar to Lacy's eye, were keenly observed in the present instance—the more, perhaps, because he now contrasted them with the well ordered appearance of Huntley. He lamented them more than usually, not from wounded taste or mortified vanity, but from regarding them as the result of his father's unfortunate habits of indolence. This,

the more he considered, the more did he regret, and longed to see him regain his due consideration in the neighbourhood. He felt, however, that much delicacy would be required in the direction of his endeavours to rouse him from this state of supineness. He sometimes even doubted whether he ought to attempt it at all, and whether he should not be wanting in the duty he owed him, if, from a selfish eagerness for his own advancement, he should infringe upon the comforts of his father's life, by urging a departure from his usual habits. This he was unwilling to do, and he determined to supply, if possible, his deficiency of exertion, by increased activity in himself.

With such thoughts he approached the house, a stately specimen of Elizabethan gothic, uniting the grandeur of outward antiquity, with the internal comforts of modern arrangement. On entering it, he inquired immediately for his parents. Lady Lacy was out in her carriage. Sir William was said to be in his study, towhich

Lacy instantly repaired, and, opening the door, found himself in his father's presence.

The room in which Sir William was sitting was very characteristic of the habits of its owner, and presented, like him, a singular mixture of regularity and negligence. On a table, on which numerous files of newspapers were carefully deposited, a miscellaneous heap, consisting of maps, plans, prints, letters, and other writings lay, confusedly huddled together. The neat book-shelves, that lined the walls, filled with handsome, well arranged books, were contrasted with the careless confusion with which easy chairs, globes, pamphlets, reviews, and new publications were, in defiance of all order, variously dispersed about the room. Sir William, dressed in a long, loose frock coat, was reclining, rather than sitting, in a deep, low, well cushioned arm-chair, with an ivory leaf-cutter in one hand, and a newspaper in the other; two other papers and an Edinburgh Review, on the floor near him; an Atlas stuck in the side of

his chair, a half cut quarto lying open on his knee, and a number of the Quarterly Review doubled down upon it, with the back uppermost.

He looked round, with apparent surprise, as his son entered the room, and surveyed him from head to foot, with a humourous air of scrutiny. "Himself! by all that's wonderful!" was his first salutation, holding out, at the same time, the fore-finger of the hand that held the newspaper. "Herbert, my hero! welcome to my arms—'on a shield gules three mullets argent!' Don't laugh, you dog, but tell me seriously how you are, and what brings you home so soon."

"I am quite well, Sir, I thank you—how are —?"

"Oh!—all well, from myself to the under groom inclusive. Well, but—oh, by the bye, you are just come in time to,—there—reach me that book in the brown cover—thank you—and put this Atlas up—and—well, but what brings you home so soon?"

"Surely, Sir, you know," said Herbert, with surprise.

"Do I, indeed? I was not aware of it."

"You sent for me, did not you?"

"Nay, don't ask me, you seem to know most about it. Was it by letter or express?"

"My mother," said Herbert, "wrote to say that——"

"Oh, it was your mother, then, it was not I—that alters the question."

"But she wrote to say, that you wanted to see me on particular business."

"Did she? well, I believe she was right; for I *have* some business on hand; and I remember saying I wished you were at home: and I think she told me she would write to you, but I did not particularly attend to her. And so you have come in consequence, eh? Well, all that I can say is, that I am very glad to see you, Sir. And how did you pass your time at Huntley? How did you make it out with my Lord Appleby? He is an

excellent man, Herbert, and a gentlemanly man, but certainly the most insipid of God's creatures. Good Lord ! how he bored me once with telling me, in his roundabout way, how he had picked up an original picture of the poet Rowley. I remember I promised, whenever he would do me the favour of a visit, to shew him, in return, a bust of Ossian: I hope I did not offend the man. And then there is his speechifying wife : I suppose she loaded you with pretty messages ?"

"Oh, yes, she said—— "

"Well, don't repeat them, to me, at least; keep them all for your mother, Sir. And pray how is my friend Joe?" the name by which he called Hartley, insinuating thereby, with the jealousy of a rival wag, that he drew contributions from the stores of the facetious Joseph Miller.

"In his usual health and spirits," said Herbert.

"In spirits! and without Emily !—a graceless dog! The conjugal yoke sits lightly on him.

Well, I suppose, you had a pleasant party, and killed your time very handsomely—and, by the bye, if you want employment now, just cut me the leaves of that new novel."

"And, perhaps, Sir, while I am doing that, you will tell me the business about which you wanted to see me."

"Certainly; a very reasonable request. I can tell it in a few words. The Bloxwich estate is going to be sold, and I am inclined to buy it; and as you are the person most concerned, I wanted to know if you would like the purchase."

"Thank you, Sir, you are very good in consulting my wishes. Yes, I think I should; but it is impossible to decide, knowing so little as——"

"Yes, yes; of course it is. You shall know more before we have done with it. I have got a description of the estate. You will find it somewhere on that table," pointing to a heap of papers. "Allen sent it me; it was from him I

heard that the property was upon sale. It will be sold, if possible, by private contract. I have the first refusal."

"Is the title good?"

"Yes—all right—I believe I have burnt Allen's letter; but no matter—I can tell you the substance. The estate is a good one; well timbered; well farmed; not run out; and every thing on it in the best repair. I have just sold all my mining shares, and mean to invest the money in land."

"I think," said Herbert, "it seems desirable, and I should be glad to see it yours; but, at the same time, I hope you will not let your kind desire to further my wishes, lead you into anything like precipitation. Another circumstance also strikes me, which may deserve some consideration. The Bloxwich property lies very near Lord Rodborough's place. The house, if I remember right, can be seen from some of the Bloxwich fields, and these must form a part of the view from the windows at Westcourt. It

is, therefore, a much greater object to Lord Rodborough than it can possibly be to us. You would regard the purchase merely as a good investment of money: to him it would form a valuable addition to his domain. To him, therefore, it is of much greater consequence; and I was thinking whether it might not appear unhandsome to treat secretly for the purchase of a property which I should imagine he would be very unwilling to lose. I should think that some previous communication ought to take place upon the subject; but I beg your pardon, Sir; I believe I am merely saying what has struck you already."

"You are right, Herbert; great wits jump. I am glad to find that you are as scrupulous as your father. I refrained from mentioning my sentiments on the subject only that I might see whether yours coincided. I will now tell you what I intend to do. I shall acquaint Lord Rodborough with the offer that has been made me. I shall tell him, that viewing the local

situation of the property, I consider the first refusal to be rightfully his; and that I shall suspend all further treaty for the purchase, until I learn that he has no intention of becoming its possessor. I have already written a letter to this effect, but it is not yet sent. And now, Herbert, as you happen to be here, I shall crave your assistance; I wish you to be the bearer of my letter. You are acquainted with Lord Rodborough, even more than I am myself. As the communication is an act of courtesy on my part, your visit shall render it more marked; and being present, you will have the opportunity of explaining or enlarging upon any circumstance that seems to require it."

Herbert expressed his entire compliance, and the letter was put into his hand.

"It seems singular," said Herbert, after a few moments thought, "considering of how much greater importance this property is to Lord Rodborough than to you, that the first offer should not rather have been made to him."

"Very true, Herbert; but the fact is, Allen, who is a sharp fellow, remembered to have heard me say a short time ago that I meant to sell out of those companies, and add to my landed property. He knows that I have money at hand, and Lord Rodborough, in spite of his fine estates, is supposed not to be blessed with an abundance of ready cash."

The conversation then ceased; it being settled that Herbert should call on Lord Rodborough on the morrow, deliver the letter, confer with his lordship, and receive his answer.

CHAPTER XII.

La finesse n'est ni une trop bonne ni une trop mauvaise qualité, elle plane entre le vice et la vertu.

BRUYERE.

Julias a manager—she's born for rule.

YOUNG.

IT will probably be by this time suspected, that it was not merely the wish expressed by Sir William Lacy, to confer with his son about the Bloxwich estate, or even the pleasure of writing, or fear of infection, on the part of Lady Lacy, which produced the letter that summoned Herbert so suddenly from Huntley Park. Lady Lacy was actuated by other motives than those expressed in her letter, and made use of a wish for Herbert's return, artlessly thrown out by Sir William, as a cloak for her own purposes.

The better to explain these, it will be neces-

sary to enter into a short account of the views of herself and her daughter, as far as they regarded Herbert.

Lady Lacy's first wish was to see him well married. But, although she had a great respect for marriage in the abstract, she was not indifferent to the choice of the future Lady Lacy, and had already chosen a helpmate for Herbert, in the person of Charlotte Hartley, only sister of her present son-in-law. The parents of Mr. Hartley had been deceased rather more than a year, and both died in the same twelvemonth. They were grave, precise, austere people, of unimpeachable morals, and with a strength of religious feeling, which caused them to be characterized, by their more worldly neighbours, by that equivocal epithet "evangelical." They were, however, unfortunately ill calculated to display these best of feelings, in an engaging light. They had not much judgment, and no talent, or natural agreeableness, and were not often even ordinarily cheerful. They were pre-

judiced and narrow-minded, and though really behind the rest of the world in their notions, fancied themselves much before it.

In the management of their two children, they had not been judicious. They had never endeavoured to make friends of them, and had enforced obedience as a dry matter of duty, unsupported by affection. There was no mutual confidence, no interchange of sentiment, and consequently, as might be expected, no similarity of thought. During their childhood, a question was always intrusive, a remark was presumptuous, and any thing like discussion was reprobated as a habit of arguing, or as a contradiction of those, who were older and wiser. Consequently the children grew up with separate interests, and feelings different from those of their parents, and longed only for the time, when they might break through their present restraint. They were, unfortunately, put rather too completely into possession of this independence, by a relation, who, dying a few

years back, had left a considerable property, divided equally between Charles Hartley and his sister.

Charles, glad of a plausible reason for removing from home, bestowed himself and his newly gained competency upon Miss Lacy, and set up a separate establishment. Charlotte, who began at the same time to assert a right to do as she pleased, was glad to escape to her sister-in-law, and had been invited with her, to make several long visits at Lacy Park, during which time she gained very much upon the affections of Lady Lacy. She was pretty, and tolerably pleasing, and had that ready smile, which secured to her, from her acquaintance, the character of a good humoured girl. Her capacity was weak, and the severity of her parents operating upon a timid disposition, not strongly fortified by a sense of duty, had injured the simplicity of her character, and driven her into habits of secresy and deceit. She was affectionate in her manner, towards those whom she

really liked; and as she was fond of Lady Lacy, who was very indulgent, and not alarmingly clever, she easily convinced that lady, that she had every possible human virtue.

It naturally followed, that Lady Lacy thould wish to effect a marriage between this phœnix and her son. The contiguity of estates; the very fact of the deceased parents having, like themselves, only one son and one daughter, all seemed to point out the propriety of this event. Besides, Charles Hartley was already her son-in-law, and Lady Lacy, who never dreamt of the advantages of extending the family connections, thought that nothing could be half so desirable and appropriate, as such a double intermarriage.

Very different were the views of Mrs. Hartley. It was her aim, to prevent her brother from ever marrying at all; for she wisely foresaw that in the event of his remaining single, the whole of the fine property to which he was heir, would probably descend to her children.

The object was difficult of attainment, and called for the exercise of considerable address. It was one which she did not avow, even to her husband, well knowing, that Charles, even if he would have entered into her plans, which was very doubtful, was the worst plotter imaginable, and would probably let out the design in some unlucky fit of sportiveness. It was also directly opposed to the views of Sir William and Lady Lacy, who both wished their son to marry, and with whose opinion on this point she always expressed the most entire concurrence. She even carried her finesse so far, as to appear to enter with great zeal into her mother's plans for effecting a marriage between Herbert and Charlotte Hartley. Indeed, upon reflection, nothing seemed so favourable to her own design. Both the parties were under her eye, both equally intimate, and always assailable by various little hints and suggestions. She saw that Charlotte was not likely to attract her brother, and that she did not care a great deal

for him. She might therefore encourage the dormant passion of each, without much danger of bringing affairs to a dangerous crisis, and hoped that by adroitly blowing hot and cold, producing just a safe degree of good-will, and circulating little reports, she could bring them into such a half engaged state, as, though it might never end in marriage with Charlotte Hartley, would prevent Lacy from uniting himself to any other person.

Such being her design, we may conceive that it was with no slight alarm, that she read in a letter written to her, by her husband from Huntley, that Herbert had fallen deeply in love with Miss Morton. True as this might be, it was written very unsuspiciously by Hartley, as a mere piece of lively rhodomontade. Indeed the letter had been sent, before it was perhaps strictly true, and at all events before it was perceptible. Mrs. Hartley placed no great reliance upon the correctness of her husband's statements; but she saw that his present report

had probability on its side, and her fears were sufficiently excited, to make her heartily wish her brother at home again. In the absence of her husband, she was staying at Lacy Park, and conveniently on the spot to confer with her mother.

Making common cause with her, she strongly pointed out the necessity of endeavouring to get Herbert out of harm's way, and securing dear Charlotte from being supplanted by this dangerous intruder.

In this emergency, Sir William fortunately expressed a wish to see his son upon business, and as it was discovered that the sooner the business was concluded, the better, sufficient authority was obtained by Lady Lacy, for requiring his immediate return. Lacy, though at first surprised on finding his return so little expected, or required by his father, was rather inclined to impute fickleness to *him*, than exaggeration to his mother, however sensible at the

same time, that these faults were inherent in each.

In the course of the evening Lacy tried to sound his family upon the subject of the Mortons. Sir William was cool and careless, and little disposed to talk about them. Lady Lacy, however, was less sparing of her remarks, and Herbert was grieved to perceive in her a more than usual appearance of rancour. There was not much either of force or novelty in her observations; but what they wanted in these respects, they gained in confidence and repetition. She adduced no instances of enormity, but she was quite satisfied with expressing her conviction, that the Mortons were very disagreeable people.

"But," said Herbert, "we have hardly given ourselves fair means of judging what they are; we really know so little of them."

"Know so little? Lord! Herbert, I am sure I know quite enough of them, especially of

Mr. Morton; I danced with him before you were born, and surely I ought to know what he is."

"Oh, if you danced with him—certainly, Ma'am. But that does not apply to the rest of the family. Lady Louisa for instance, is, I am told, a very quiet, unaffected woman; but then she is so great an invalid, you can never find her a sociable neighbour. The son that is abroad, is supposed to be clever. Lady Malvern, too, is very cheerful, and conversible, and———"

"My dear Herbert, there is no use in talking; you will never persuade me, that black is white, because I know very well, that the Mortons are very disagreeable people. I always used to say they were."

"Mr. Morton has his faults, I believe," pursued Herbert; "however, his sister, Mrs. Denham, was by all accounts, a very superior woman—very different from her brother."

"Very different? Not at all. I knew her

as well as I know you. I have seen her a thousand times; she was as like her brother as she could stare."

"You misunderstand me, Ma'am; I was not speaking of her appearance, it was her character."

"Well, my dear, it is all the same. I say she was very like her brother, and so she was, and so she ought to be, for they were *own* brother and sister, and very near of the same age. There is no use in talking, Herbert; you may say what you please, but I know that the Mortons are very disagreeable people."

Herbert saw the inutility of argument, and was inclined to drop the subject, which probably would have been then dismissed, had not his sister, who had appeared to take no interest in what had passed, carelessly inquired what was the name of Mr. Morton's eldest unmarried daughter.

"Agnes," said Herbert, half-pleased, half

alarmed, at the prospect of hearing his mistress canvassed.

"Oh, ay, Agnes. She is very handsome."

Herbert glowed with pleasure, at hearing such spontaneous praise. Lady Lacy looked aghast, and stared at her daughter, as if in doubt, whether she heard her words aright. Mrs. Hartley repeated her opinion.

"Lord! Emily!" exclaimed her ladyship, in a tone of alarm, driven out of all forbearance, by what appeared to her so flagrant an instance of treachery and desertion.

"Nay, mother, surely she is handsome," replied the daughter, giving her at the same time a significant look, which said very plainly, "leave her to me."

Lady Lacy acquiesced; but sat meanwhile upon thorns, utterly unable to divine her daughter's system of proceeding, for she was not tactician enough to understand the policy of allowing an enemy any merit. Mrs. Hartley went on praising the personal graces of Agnes,

till she thought she had established in her brother's mind a good opinion of her judgment. She then adroitly shifted her ground, and after one more observation upon Miss Morton's beautiful eyes, quietly added, "they say she is not good-tempered."

"Who said so?" inquired her brother.

"I don't remember," replied Mrs. Hartley.

"I saw no symptoms of ill temper," said Herbert.

"Oh, what, when you met her at the Applebys?—very likely. One never knows, unless one is quite intimate. It is that which makes marriage such a lottery. What a pretty woman her sister is!—Lady Malvern, I mean—and how well she has married! and she had very little fortune, and was not nearly so handsome as Agnes. I hear they expect *her* to do better still, and I dare say they will carry their point. They are dexterous people, and have always been trying to push themselves on."

Lacy could not refrain from mentioning the

refusal of Lord Midhurst, as a proof of Miss Morton's disinterestedness.

"I dare say she will do better than that," said his sister; "Lord Skipton is supposed to be very much in debt, and could not have made a handsome settlement. She was quite right in refusing Lord Midhurst, and I have no doubt her family think so."

Herbert had at this moment an unpleasant remembrance of Lord Malvern's satisfaction at the conduct of Agnes, and his confident hope of seeing her eventually well married. Doubtless he was but reckoning his lady's sentiments.

Mrs. Hartley proceeded: "I hear they want to marry her to her cousin, the Duke of Swansea: but he keeps very much aloof. The quarrel has been but lately made up. The late duke was not upon good terms with the Mortons; he did not approve of his sister's marriage; and no wonder—for it was a poor match for her."

Lady Lacy here could not refrain from

telling her son and daughter, what they knew very well already, that Mr. Morton had once the presumption to aspire to her hand. She expatiated at some length upon this point, and the subject of the Mortons was then dropped.

CHAPTER XIII.

Le monde est plein de gens qui faisant exterieurement et par habitude la comparaison d'eux mêmes avec les autres decident toujours en faveur de leur propre merite, et agissent consequemment.

Un Pamphile est plein de lui même, ne se perd point de vue, ne sort point de l'idée de sa grandeur, de ses alliances, de sa charge, de sa dignite. BRUYERE.

NEXT morning, sufficiently soon to ensure the prospect of finding Lord Rodborough at home, without being very unfashionably early, Herbert Lacy set out for Westcourt.

The peer, whom he was about to visit, was a handsome, dignified looking man, now on the verge of threescore, but still vain of his fine person, and endeavouring to render less visible the ravages of age, by youthful attire of the most fashionable kind. His prominent characteristic

was an inordinate vanity which obscured many of his best qualities, and gave him an air of affectation which, when his age was taken into account, caused many persons to undervalue the sense and talent which he really possessed. He was a strange mixture of arrogance and good-nature; apparently difficult of access, and impatient of controul, but, in truth, easily led by any one who would take the trouble to flatter his vanity; and though repulsive and proud in his general deportment, was courteous and winning in his manner towards those who appeared sufficiently to acknowledge his high claims. With the great importance of the Earl of Rodborough, nobody could be more fully impressed than he was himself. Popularity he was both too proud and too indolent to court, and he rather took the opposite course of husbanding his civilities, and not making himself cheap and common in the eyes of his neighbours. Of them he affected to know very little; seldom asked them to his house, and paid off

his scores, by a sweeping admission to occasional fêtes. His hospitalities were generally confined to people of his own set, and a few "young men about town," who came to Westcourt to kill his pheasants, and dangle in the train of Lady Rodborough.

Her ladyship was one whom, if one was required to express her character in the fewest possible words, one should call, a woman of the world. She lived for the world, and was seldom very happy out of it. Every person, and every thing, she viewed in a hard, dry, worldly light; and consequently to those who require some degree of heart, not all her conversational powers could render her perfectly agreeable. Her daughters, the Ladies Jane and Mary Sedley, were clever girls, who might have been liked, as well as admired, if they had not thought too much of themselves, and been drilled upon the exclusive system, into a scrupulous fear of committing themselves, by ac-

knowledging anybody that was not to be seen in certain parties.

After a ride of eight miles, Lacy arrived at the door of Westcourt House, an elegant, and extensive mansion, in the Palladian style, built by the grandfather of the present lord. Lord Rodborough was said to be at home, and Lacy dismounted and entered the house. He was first shown into a waiting-room, containing a few family pictures, and some genealogical records of the antiquity of the owner's lineage; while the servant went to announce his presence to his lordship. After a delay well contrived, to impress the visitor with an awful sense of the exalted presence he was about to enter, the servant returned to say, that Lord Rodborough was at liberty to see him, and he was conducted through several passages, to what seemed to be his lordship's private sitting-room. His lordship was there discovered, seated in an easy chair, with a toothpick in one hand, and a newspaper in the other.

As Lacy entered, he looked up with such an air of surprise, as might have led any one to suppose that he first became conscious at this moment, that such a person was in the house. This, however, was not the case, for the servant had previously informed him, who it was that solicited the honour of waiting upon him, and he had meanwhile been preparing himself to look as unprepared as possible. Peering with half-closed eyes at Lacy as he approached, he got up slowly from his chair, and leaning with one hand upon the table, that he might not appear to rise with too much *empressement* to receive his visitor, he extended to him one finger of the other hand, that held the tooth-pick, and motioning to him to take a seat, sunk back gracefully into his own chair.

After answering Lord Rodborough's gracious hope that his father was well, Lacy explained the object of his coming, and delivered the letter with which he was charged, and which his lordship received with as much condescension

of manner, as if its object was to entreat a favour instead of conferring one. Indeed, he had rather it had been so, for he was very much alive to the awkwardness of being indebted to his inferior. Great also as was his respect for that self-possession, which is the result of an acquaintance with good society, yet as Lacy was a very young man, and merely the son of a baronet, he would have been better pleased to have seen him sheepishly overwhelmed with the awfulness of the presence into which he was ushered. He could then have been very gracious and encouraging, and would have kindly smoothed the terrors of his brow, in consideration for the feelings of the downcast youth. But as Lacy did not seem by any means awe-stricken, he had only to open the letter, and pointing to a roll of paper that lay upon the table, "While I am casting my eye over this, Mr. Lacy," he obligingly added, "perhaps you would like to amuse yourself with looking at that map. It is a new survey of my Westcourt

property." Then adjusting his cravat, slowly taking snuff, and making sonorous use of a silk pocket handkerchief, he vouchsafed to peruse Sir William Lacy's letter.

Lacy looked up at him, when he thought he had finished, and saw with surprise, a transient cloud of displeasure pass over his lordship's brow, as he folded it up again. It was not that he was otherwise than pleased with any thing expressed in the letter; but he had been ruffled by observing that there were no &c.'s under his name in the direction, and that though the edges of the note were gilt, those of the envelope were plain. Recovering himself, however, with admirable facility, and looking as if no such slights had been offered, he turned to Lacy with an affable smile, and expressed himself pleased with the contents of Sir William Lacy's communication.

" Make my compliments to your father, Mr. Lacy, and say that I feel much gratified by his attention. Let me see—which is this pro-

perty he alludes to? Bloxwich? Bloxwich? Ay, I know it. It adjoins some covers of mine. I am much obliged to Sir William Lacy for remembering the circumstance. I should not have thought of it myself. Now you recall it to my mind, I perfectly recollect the place. Morton used to say, that whenever it was sold, I ought to buy it. He thought it was an object to me. Perhaps it may be so—I cannot be certain—not but that if it was mine to-morrow, I might never set my foot upon it—and then, as for buying estates—faith! I don't know what you may be, but I am infernally poor, just now," said he, with a smile, and a shrug of that happy complacency, with which the lord of yearly tens of thousands, can talk of poverty and distress.

"This property, my lord," said Lacy, "would certainly be very desirable to my father. He thought, however, that from its situation, it would be still more desirable to you, and was therefore willing to waive the

purchase in your favour, if you had any strong wish to possess it. Since, however—if I understand you rightly, my lord—since it is not so great an object as to make you desirous of buying it"—

"Nay," interposed Lord Rodborough, quickly, "I don't say exactly that: it is no such great object to be sure to *me*; but yet I should certainly like to have it. It joins my present estate, as you know; and it is a whim of mine, Mr. Lacy, to have as much land as I can round my house: I have very few thousand acres at present. I hold that a certain extent of domain is indispensable to a country place; one does not like to be elbowed. I beg, at the same time, that you will tell your father from me, that if I did not wish to buy the property myself, there are no hands in which I had rather see it than in his."

Lacy bowed quite as low as he thought this message demanded. Lord Rodborough having now discussed this business as long as he

thought consistent with his sense of its insignificance, gave a turn to the conversation, by addressing a few questions to his young visitor.

"Is your father in parliament?"

He was answered in the negative.

"How far is it from hence to—pshaw—what a memory I have? What is the name of your father's place?"

Lacy told him.

"Ay, exactly so, called after the family name—a nice comfortable looking place. Pray, did your father or grandfather buy it?"

The ancient blood of the Lacys felt a strong disposition to mount rather indignantly into Herbert's cheeks, as he replied that the property had been several hundred years in the family.

"Ay, indeed! I was not aware of it. Pray, are not the Dorringtons neighbours of yours?"

Lacy informed him that they lived about twenty miles off.

"Really!—then whose is that cursed fright of a red brick house, that affects a park and an

avenue, about five miles from hence on the London road?"

"That is Coldfield Grange," said Herbert, "and belongs to Mr. Hartley."

"Oh, the Hartleys. Ay, I have heard of them. Is your father acquainted with them?"

Lacy explained the intimate terms they were upon, and the marriage by which the families were connected, to all which his lordship replied, by carelessly declaring that he was not aware of it.

Lord Rodborough having, by this time, sufficiently exonerated himself from the imputation of knowing too much of the petty concerns of his more humble neighbours, began to exhibit what he thought would be a flattering curiosity about the habits and proceedings of Lacy himself; and prefaced his queries by asking whether he had left College.

Lacy had left it two years.

"Oh—indeed! what University?"

"Oxford."

"Hem—what college?"

"Christchurch."

"Christchurch—ah—Malvern went to Christchurch. It is not a bad college—(I was there myself)—but damned expensive. I kept eight hunters, and other things too, faith! if the truth must be told; but then I was thought to exceed a little—I never let Malvern do such things. Do me the favour,—you are nearest to it—do me the favour to ring the bell. Did you take a degree?"

"I did."

He had taken a first class degree; but this he did not mention.

"Going into any profession?"

"None whatever."

"No profession! Perhaps you are the eldest son."

Lacy assented.

"What are your brothers to be?"

Lacy told him that he had none.

"Oh! the only son—hem! really! Do you ever hunt?"

Lacy informed him that he did.

"Fond of shooting? Much good shooting at Lacy?"

His visitor said it was tolerably good.

"I am glad to hear you are in such luck. Mine was infamous last year. You would hardly believe it, but we did not kill more in the whole season, than fourteen hundred head of pheasants. We are overrun with those damned poachers. I should like to hang up a score or two; the tread-mill is too good for them."

Lacy could not sincerely applaud the humanity of this sentiment. But before he could express his guarded dissent, or avoid the question by giving a turn to the subject, the door opened, and a servant entered.

"I am going to drive out," said Lord Rodborough; "order an open carriage."

The servant withdrew, and Lacy, who thought that he had received more than a

sufficient hint, rose immediately to take his leave.

"Don't go, I beg," said his lordship. "You are not detaining me in the least. Do me the favour," he added, seeing that his intimation was not effectual. "Do me the favour to stay a few minutes while I write a short note to your father. Perhaps you would like to see the house. I will direct my servant to show it to you."

Lacy had nothing to object, and was not more obliged than the occasion required. At this moment, there entered the room, a gentlemanly good-looking man, of upright carriage, and firm step; but whom a few wrinkles, and a considerable intermixture of grey with his dark hair showed to have passed the middle age.

"Morton," said Lord Rodborough, as he approached the table, I have something to tell you. That Bloxwich farm, which you said I ought to have, is to be sold. Mr. Lacy has come here—are you acquainted," looking at

each alternately, and nodding slightly by way of introduction—“ Mr. Lacy has come here with a letter from his father, informing me that the property is now upon sale; and if *I* should have any intention to become its purchaser, he could not possibly think of interfering with my wishes. Extremely attentive in Sir William Lacy.”

Lacy felt rather annoyed at the air of servility which Lord Rodborough attempted to give to his father's proceedings; and thinking that his own letter would set his conduct in a better light, took this opportunity of assuring his lordship, that his father could not have the slightest objection to the letter being seen by any friend to whom Lord Rodborough might wish to show it. His lordship looked as if he thought such a permission quite unnecessary, and coolly adding, that Morton might see it if he liked, handed it to that gentleman. The latter received it with a short glance at Lacy, which

seemed to crave permission from *him*, and of which he secretly acknowledged the politeness.

"Extremely handsome," said Mr. Morton, after he had read it. "The farm is certainly, in point of situation, by no means so great an object to Sir William Lacy as it is to you, my lord; and I see," turning towards Lacy, "that Sir William kindly resigns his claims in consequence. Nothing can be more fair and liberal: I only wish one could see more instances of this accommodating spirit: but it is not every one who, when he has a purchase in view for himself, cares how much he stands in his neighbour's light."

"Yes, yes—exactly so," said his lordship, rather impatiently, for he was not quite pleased with Mr. Morton for seeming to imply that Sir William Lacy had acted merely from a liberal wish to accommodate a neighbour, and not out of any exclusive consideration for the dignity of the Earl of Rodborough; then, hastening to

change the subject, he repeated to Lacy his offer to let him see the house if he wished it.

Lacy accepted the offer, and Mr. Morton, with prompt civility, volunteered to be his conductor. Lacy was gratified by this attention, much more in fact than he could have been by any such attention from Lord Rodborough. He was pleased with Mr. Morton; and though now disposed to like as much as possible, the father of Agnes, yet he was agreeably surprised, to find him so much pleasanter than he expected. He was struck with his gentlemanly address; and having been taught to accuse him of sycophancy, was not prepared to discover that manly independence, and total absence of servility, which characterized his manner towards Lord Rodborough. He instantly became persuaded, that Mr. Morton had long had great injustice done him by his neighbours at Lacy, and was induced by his civility to him, to believe that the ill will which had been thought

reciprocal, was in fact confined to his own family.

They conversed a good deal in their passage through the rooms. Mr. Morton made civil inquiries after Sir William Lacy, whose habits of seclusion he seemed to suppose had proceeded entirely from ill health. Lacy afterwards mentioned his having met Lady Malvern and Agnes at Huntley Park. He thought that Mr. Morton looked inquiringly at him, as he pronounced the name of the latter, and he consequently felt some slight embarrassment. However, nothing material was said by either, and they quickly passed on to another subject, their common acquaintance, Mr. Sackville. This was a fruitful theme, for they both knew him well, and could speak about him without reserve.

"I expect him soon," said Mr. Morton, "and hope he will make a considerable stay with us. Perhaps," he added, in a different

tone, "as he is so great a friend of yours, I may hope for the pleasure of seeing you at Dodswell some time during that period."

It may easily be conceived with what satisfaction Lacy received this invitation, an invitation which at once removed many of his fears of an ill reception from the Mortons, and promised to open to him every facility for frequently enjoying the society of Agnes. He abstained, however, from exhibiting any strong outward symptoms of delight, and merely bowed civilly, and professed that he should have much pleasure in waiting upon Mr. Morton.

That gentleman, who knew that Lacy and his daughter had, for the first time in their lives, passed several days together in the same house at Huntley, was fully alive to the possibility of their having made a favourable impression on each other; and in this opinion he was rather confirmed by the slight hesitation and embarrassment with which his daugh-

ter's name was mentioned by Lacy. This was barely perceptible, yet could not altogether escape the eye of one who was prepared to look for it. From the invitation which followed, we may collect that the possibility of a marriage between Agnes and Lacy was regarded by Mr. Morton with no unfavourable eye. In fact, owing to the long cessation of his intercourse with Sir William Lacy, every spark of his previous ill will towards that gentleman had almost expired; and his pride, which was great, was now flattered by the idea of having the hand of his second daughter sought by the heir of that ancient house.

He had besides other motives for wishing to see his daughter soon united to the first wealthy suitor that offered himself. Mr. Morton was a distressed man. Proud and ostentatious, and fond of courting the society of those who were superior in means and station, he had long aspired to a style of living to which his fortune was inadequate. He was consequently, by this

time, deeply involved; and had already mortgaged almost every acre of his landed property. He had long been aware of the necessity of retrenchment, and had endeavoured to practise it. But the pride which led him into this ruinous system of expense, rendered vain his projects of economy. It prevented him, in the first place, from avowing his situation to his wife and children, and thereby availing himself of their cooperation. He could therefore propose no great and effectual measure of retrenchment, lest they should demand the reason. For the same cause, and for fear of exciting the suspicions of his neighbours, he made no perceptible alteration in his style of living; and satisfied himself with trifling acts of self-denial, which, although they goaded him with the constant remembrance of his embarrassment, produced a saving too small to be of any material assistance.

In this situation, he cast wistful eyes towards the large and increasing fortune of his daugh-

ter Agnes. From this fortune, unless she previously married, he could for the next five years expect no assistance, as it would during that time be in the hands of trustees, who were not likely to suffer any part of it to be applied to the payment of his debts. But, in the event of his daughter's marriage, the whole income of this fortune would be at her disposal; and if her husband were himself wealthy, might probably be devoted, in a great measure, to relieve the distresses of her father.

These considerations made Mr. Morton eager to hasten this event, and ready to bestow her upon one who, in point of worldly circumstances, was so unexceptionable a match as Lacy; and this will account for his present civility to that gentleman, on whom, in this their first interview, he made a very favourable impression.

CHAPTER XIV.

> The property by what it is should go,
> Not by the title—she is young, wise, fair;
> In these to nature she's immediate heir,
> And these breed honour.
>
> *All's Well that Ends Well.*

Lacy, on his return from Westcourt, had a conversation with his father, on the subject of his visit, when, after entertaining him with a humourous account of his reception by Lord Rodborough, and the acts and sayings of that important personage, he came at length to the more interesting relation of his meeting with Mr. Morton, and the conversation that passed between them.

Sir William listened in silence, with a manner, from which it would have been difficult to collect whether he was gratified or displeased.

He gave a slight shrug, when his son had ended; and made no immediate reply.

"Well!" he exclaimed at length, "to give the devil his due, Morton is a well behaved man, and I find no fault with you for liking him. He can act the gentleman, very creditably. Civility is his forte. The man delights in picking up a fresh subject to practise upon. He has won all the rest of his neighbours, and now he wishes to subdue us."

"I cannot think him unwise, Sir," replied Herbert, "in wishing to cultivate your acquaintance; and I hope you will not suppose that there can be any thing mean or discreditable in such an endeavour on his part."

"Discreditable! certainly not. There, Herbert, you go too far. If I appeared at all displeased, it was only because I thought that, considering our relative situations, he might have been somewhat less precipitate. He might have suffered the first overtures to come from me."

"In that I entirely agree with you, Sir. But

I think you will find that he has not been at all wanting in delicacy towards you. His invitation was to me, and only with a view to my meeting Sackville: he expressed no intention of calling upon you, or of drawing you into a visit to him: he rather seemed to take it for granted that you would *not* visit him—inquired after your health—and spoke as if he thought that nothing but indisposition on your part had hitherto prevented him from being better acquainted."

"Why, what the deuce!" exclaimed the baronet, with a humorous look of vexation, "does the fellow think I am bedridden? I hope you did not allow him to go away with the persuasion that your father is so poor a creature that he cannot pay a morning visit."

"Perhaps, Sir, I was wrong—but I did not attempt to undeceive him. Indeed I hardly knew what other cause to assign, and I thought it was better that he should attribute the cessation of your intercourse to your ill health, than to any feeling of hostility."

"Hostility! Herbert—God forbid. I am sure I wish the man no harm; and if we have never been very good friends, it is quite as much his fault as mine. If he means to be civil, so do I: if he does not, *c'est égal.* You say he has asked you to his house. Very well—then go and see him. I have not the least objection to that; only don't drag your aged father out of his sanctuary, and set him down to the troublesome task of bandying civilities with this polished piece of hardware."

"I thank you, Sir," said Herbert, after a short pause, "for the permission you give me; but I would, at the same time, mention that my visiting that family will place you in such a situation that you cannot, without either a marked display of incivility, or some strong plea, as that of illness, refrain from visiting them too. Mr. Morton may probably extend some invitation to yourself, and you will then be compelled to do at last, what could have been done with a better grace in the first instance, and you will

be placed under the disagreeable necessity of following where you ought to lead. On this account I cannot help wishing ——"

"I understand you," interrupted Sir William; "you wish that I should call upon him first. Very well—I will think about it. *You* may call at all events. But," he added, after a pause, "I cannot understand, Herbert, why you are now so eager to be acquainted with the very persons whom you used to hold in such aversion."

It may here be observed, in order to account for what will otherwise appear a very remarkable want of quick-sightedness, that Sir William Lacy was hitherto unacquainted with the fact of his son having met any of the Morton family at Huntley Park. Far from suspecting him of having fallen in love with Miss Morton, he was not even certain that any such person existed. He knew that the lady who *was* Miss Morton was now married to Lord Malvern; but his information did not extend to the fact of her

having a younger sister. All the little details respecting the affairs of his neighbours, which the microscopic mind of Lady Lacy gleaned and retained so faithfully, were to him a species of rubbish which he impatiently dismissed from his thoughts. Nor did he often avail himself of his lady's retail assortment of petty information. Led, by a pardonable predilection for beauty, into marrying a woman of a very ordinary mind, he soon discovered that there was little similarity in their turn of thought. Her vapid and pointless conversation generally gave him a sensation of weariness; and as she never understood his jokes, he had as little satisfaction in talking as in listening to her. Lady Lacy's love of talking was not checked by this want of a willing hearer: but if she did not relax in her volubility, Sir William did in his attention, and in course of time relapsed into a habit of seldom hearing any thing she said. His mechanical assent, though it might perhaps have deceived a stranger, and was even some satisfaction to

Lady Lacy, was, nevertheless, the sure indication of perfect absence.

Lady Lacy, despairing of finding in her husband a willing listener to her matrimonial views respecting Herbert, had not communicated to him any of the little machinery which she had put into play, in conjunction with her daughter, for the purpose of withdrawing him from the fascinations of Miss Morton. She had, however, said a little about this young lady being at Huntley, to which little Sir William paid no attention, and was now as unconscious as if that piece of intelligence had never been uttered in his presence.

We left the baronet expressing his wonder that his son should be anxious to visit the Mortons. A silence followed this remark. Herbert was to speak, and his rising colour and anxious countenance showed that he was with some difficulty making up his mind to a communication of no common importance. His father atten-

tively watched him, and preserved an air of silent expectation.

"I could give you," said Herbert, speaking slowly and with evident effort, "many reasons for my wish to be better acquainted with the Mortons—reasons that would be quite satisfactory, and partly real. But I could not reconcile myself to any thing short of a full explanation. I have one reason, which with me outweighs every other. I am attached to Miss Morton."

The words were spoken almost breathlessly, and Herbert cast down his eyes as if oppressed by the effort, and wanting the will or power to look up and watch the impression they had made. Sir William heard him without exhibiting much either of surprise or displeasure. He, however, turned for an instant rather red, and looked grave and perplexed. He did not immediately speak, and the communication was followed by a silence of many seconds.

"Are you engaged to this lady?" were the baronet's first words, which were uttered in a tone studiously modulated, so as not to convey either approbation or the contrary. Herbert felt relieved by the straight-forward calmness of the question.

"I am not engaged to her, Sir," he answered. "Miss Morton has never heard me speak so explicitly as I now speak to you. But my attachment cannot be unknown to her. She must have guessed it; and I think is disposed to return it. Of this I feel so confident that I would have offered myself, without fear of rejection, when I last saw her, had I been secure of your approval. But I determined to take no further steps without first consulting you."

"Right, my boy, quite right. But let me understand who the lady is. Is she the younger sister of Lady Malvern?"

"She is."

"And you met her ——"

"At Lord Appleby's."

"Humph! a very long acquaintance! I shall not ask you any thing, Herbert, about her looks and her disposition. You are attached to her—that is enough. Of course she is a phœnix in your eyes, and the only woman that can ever make you happy. I can allow for the flights of a young man in your situation. I am not so unreasonable as to expect you to talk very rationally on such a subject."

"I am aware, Sir, that whatever I say in praise of Miss Morton, must necessarily be received with some distrust; and I am therefore, the more anxious that you should be enabled to see her, and judge for yourself. This was my reason for wishing to persuade you to visit the Mortons."

"And so I will, Herbert. I was half-inclined before, but now I am determined. An old head is very useful in these cases, when you young people are in the third heaven, with your brains half turned, and your eyes not half open. I will see your lady, Herbert, and I trust I

shall approve of her. I don't like the family, that I tell you once for all; I never did like them, and I fear I never shall. Besides, it is a bad connection—low—unworthy of you, and very inferior to what I always hoped you would make."

"*They* are well connected," said Herbert. "The Swanseas, the Rodboroughs ——"

"True, true, others have disregarded their low extraction. There is but little pride of the true kind left, and I am the more anxious to keep alive the few sparks which I feel myself. I dare say, in this enlightened age, people would call it prejudice. Commend me, Herbert, to an old prejudice. There is often more solid virtue in it, than in all the new fangled wisdom of your modern lights. But I won't stay moralizing. Oh! it will do extremely well; the Mortons sprung from the mine, and so does the diamond. There is a simile, Sir, for your lady's eyes. But it is no joking matter. It vexes me, Herbert—it vexes me; but for your sake I will make the

best of it. You have behaved extremely well; you could not controul your affections, nor did I expect it; but what you could do, you have done. I say again, I don't like it, but it concerns you, more than me: and God forbid, my dear son, that I should sacrifice your happiness to the gratification of my own feelings."

Sir William held out his hand to his son, which the latter grasped with fervent gratitude, and accompanied this testimony with many a warm expression of sincere thanks.

"Herbert, you have almost gained me," pursued the baronet; "but your hardest task is still to come. This news will be a blow to your mother: she hates the Mortons, like toad or asp; and besides, I think has set her heart upon seeing you married to Charlotte Hartley. You must go cautiously to work."

"I fear I must," replied Herbert, thoughtfully. "I am thinking, when and how to break it to her."

"And I am thinking," said the baronet, "that

for the present, you had better not break it to her at all. I don't counsel you to be less open in your general conduct to her, than you are to me: the same duty is owed to both. But this is a peculiar case. To your mother's virtues, Herbert, neither of us is a stranger. She is as good a wife, and as good a mother as ever lived: but she has strong prejudices—prejudices which, I fear, are not to be combatted by reason, and which time alone can soften. One of the strongest of her impressions is an aversion to the Mortons. If she sees that you are an interested person, she will receive all you say with distrust, and will only cling more firmly to her old persuasion. Pursue a gentle, unobtrusive course, and in due time, I have no doubt, you may soothe her into charity with all the world, Lady Louisa Morton not excepted."

After a little further conversation, it was settled, that on an early day, Sir William Lacy should go over with his son to Dodswell, and call upon Mr. Morton. It was a great sacrifice

for the baronet to make, as it was opposed, at the same time, by his pride, his indolence, and the inveterate influence of a habit of seclusion. But his mind being once made up, he cheerfully complied, and exhaled all his spleen, through the easy medium of a few testy jokes.

Lacy's prospects were also brightened, though unknown to him, by the circumstance of his sister having quitted them on that day. She was expected to be absent for the next three weeks on visits at a distance. Thus, her quiet but dangerous opposition, and the artful difficulties which she would have thrown in the way of a meeting with the Mortons, would now for a time be withdrawn, and nothing remained but to pacify the fears of Lady Lacy, whose astonishment was extreme, when she heard that Sir William was actually going to call upon the Mortons.

"Why, surely, Sir William, you cannot be serious," she exclaimed, in a high pitched tone of wonder.

"Quite serious! Ask Herbert!" was his quiet reply.

"Oh, I dare say you are both in the same tale: but what makes you go to visit those Mortons of all people in the world?"

"I will tell you in a few words. Mr. Morton met Herbert the other day, and asked him to his house. This showed a wish on his part to be civil. Herbert is bound to call upon him, and I take that opprtunity of being civil too."

"It is really very strange," said her ladyship, "to visit those people now at last, after having lived near them so long, and never taken any notice; if they *were* to be called upon, why did you never do it before?"

"Very true—why did not I? But I am afraid, *that* is not worth an inquiry now. If they were ever worth visiting, they are so at present; and if I have long arrears to pay, the sooner they are paid the better. I go to Dodswell—that is decided. You, my dear, if you

like, may also do yourself the pleasure of waiting upon Lady Louisa."

"But I don't like, and it is not a pleasure, and Lady Louisa might have waited upon me."

"But, my dear, you forget that she is an invalid. She has been under a course of elegant indispositions for the last ten years at least."

"Invalid! Yes, a fine excuse!" said Lady Lacy, looking very indignant. "I dare say if I *was* to call upon her she would not return my visit: and all because she thinks herself ill. I don't see why I have not a right to be an invalid too."

"So you have, my dear, an undoubted right; but not to be so great an invalid as Lady Louisa. She was a duke's daughter, you were only a simple gentlewoman."

"That does not signify at all: a gentlewoman is a gentlewoman all the world over, and I expect to be treated as one; and I shall have

nothing to do with her ladyship, I promise her, unless she calls first upon me, or sends some message to say why she does not."

The visit was made, and terminated as such visits often do. Mr. Morton was from home, and was not expected back for several days; and the baronet and his son had only the satisfaction of leaving their cards. On their return, Lady Lacy met them with a face of more glee than could have been expected, considering how much the visit which they had just paid, had been contrary to her inclinations. She held in her hand two cards, about which she seemed to have much to say.

"Well, Sir William," she began, "I am quite glad, that Herbert came home from Huntley, and went over to Lord Rodborough. I am sure I thought it was quite proper; and here, you see, they have not forgotten it. The servant is only just gone. Philip says he had more cards to leave. I dare say he is going to the

Hartleys — the Hartleys know Lord Rodborough and—"

"My dear Lady Lacy," interrupted Sir William, "I dare say you are talking excellent sense, but I really cannot catch your meaning."

Lady Lacy put into his hand two cards, one addressed to Sir William and herself, the other to Herbert, requesting the pleasure of their company to a ball, to be given by the Earl and Countess of Rodborough, at the distance of about a month from that time.

The baronet read them with a smile. "No fool like the old fool," said he. "Lord Rodborough give a ball! why should not I? I am old enough."

"Very true," said his lady, quietly; "but we have no unmarried daughters, Sir William."

"Spoken like an oracle; and you thereby imply, that those who have no unmarried daughters have no occasion to give balls. You

never expressed yourself more pithily. Rest your colloquial fame on that, as Dr. Johnson said before me."

Lady Lacy did not seem to understand him; and prudently avoiding a collision with Dr. Johnson, went on lamenting the circumstance of their having no unmarried daughters. "If we had, you know, Sir William, I could have taken them to this ball."

"True, my dear; but I would have you consider, that if you had several unmarried daughters, you might never have had this ball to take them to;" and having delivered this whimsical specimen of a logical deduction with much significance and solemnity, he withdrew, leaving Lady Lacy to the hopeless task of unravelling the hidden meaning of his parting speech.

CHAPTER XV.

> Slight are the outward signs of evil thought—
> Within—within—'twas there the spirit wrought.
>
> BYRON.

On the fourth day after Sir William Lacy's visit to Dodswell, Mr. Morton rode over to pay his respects to the baronet. His reception, though not exactly cold, was rather constrained; and there was, on either side, a measured civility, a punctilious attention, and a scrupulous selection of subjects, which showed how far they were from being upon easy terms. Lady Lacy received Mr. Morton at first with positive coldness. Herbert was not present; and the visit would probably have been far from satisfactory to the feelings of any of the parties, had not

Mr. Morton been accompanied by one who was secure of a favourable reception from the Lacys, and whose ingratiating manners, and agreeable conversation tended very much to break the formality of the meeting. This was Mr. Sackville, the common friend of Herbert Lacy, and the Mortons.

Mr. Sackville was, at this time, not more than thirty-four, and bore in his countenance the appearance of being still younger. He was of middling stature, and was altogether one who would not anywhere have been remarked, either as an handsome or an ordinary person. His face, however, if not regularly handsome, was very prepossessing, particularly when he spoke. Its expression was acute without being sarcastic; and full of mild intelligence and playful animation. There was a fascination in his smile, and an ingratiating warmth in his manner, which made every one fancy themselves, for the time, the objects of his peculiar favour. In society he was very agreeable; his conversation was sen-

sible, varied, and amusing, displaying considerable information and knowledge of the world, and was always adapted with much skill to the tastes of his associates. Added to this, he had an air of openness and sincerity which conciliated good opinion; and he was master of that refined flattery, which by an almost imperceptible air of deference, raises persons in their own opinion, while, at the same time, it equally exalts the character of him who employs it.

Such were the captivating qualities of Sackville—would we could add, that his disposition corresponded with the bright promise which these afforded. Sackville was an example of the slight degree of virtuous feeling attainable by a man of cool temperament and strong sense, when unawed by conscientious fears, without one sentiment of religion, regulating himself only by the practice of the world, and his own dry, self-formed rule of expediency. He was, in fact, a man without one grain of principle,

utterly selfish, perfidious, and heartless: one whom no generous feeling warmed, and to whom the most touching appeal would have been made in vain. His ruling motive was self-interest, and to this he could sacrifice, with remorseless steadiness, the welfare of his dearest friends. He was not what is usually called a vicious man. He indulged in no pleasures to excess, and was regular in his habits. He knew the value of appearances, and paid a careful attention to decorum. Fortunately, as society is now constituted, morality and religion are not so unfashionable but that some appearance of both is often thought desirable, even by those who do not possess the least of either. This was precisely Sackville's view of the case. Had atheism been fashionable he would probably have professed it; but as irreligion is no longer considered the badge of talent, he maintained a decorous observance of the ordinances of his church, and always spoke of it and its ministers with respect. He was not a man of strong

passions. He neither loved nor hated violently. His proceedings were seldom influenced by feeling. They were the cool result of calculation; and, whether friend or foe opposed his plans, he was equally ready to sacrifice him. He could assume the appearance of every virtue without possessing the reality of any: nay, his very vices were subdued into order and subjection, and reserved, as it were, for great occasions. His very selfishness, inordinate as it was, could be laid aside in the commerce of society; and petty kindnesses would be gracefully rendered, and little acts of self-denial cheerfully incurred in behalf, perhaps, of an individual, whom, to secure his own advantage, he could ruin without a pang. His abilities were of a high order, and while they included much that was elegant, were still eminently practical. He was very adroit in matters of business, and had a quick insight into character, and a simple and persuasive eloquence, which gave him a considerable influence over those with whom he was brought

into contact. He had been several years the representative of a small borough, and had made himself useful and respected in the House of Commons; and spoke, if not ambitiously, yet always sensibly and well.

Sackville was received with great cordiality by Sir William and Lady Lacy, who, though they did not know much of him, were pleased with his manners; and who, had he been much less agreeable, would have still felt themselves bound to welcome with warmth and gladness the friend and preserver of their son. Cheered by his presence, and enlivened by his conversation, the party began to relax from their formality: and Mr. Morton seemed to have an additional claim to the goodwill of the Lacys in his connection with Sackville. He also appeared to feel the same himself, and, set at ease by this consideration, he was enabled to make himself agreeable to his restored acquaintance with increased success. Before he went, he had even considerably re-established himself in the good graces of Lady Lacy, and had

conveyed to her an apologetic message from Lady Louisa, so prettily worded, as almost to disarm her punctilious pride, and very much soften her dislike of that lady.

When her visitors were gone, Lady Lacy allowed that Mr. Morton was not a vulgar man in his manners, and she really thought did not look much older than he did twenty years ago; and, as for Lady Louisa, she was sorry for her, poor woman! She could easily believe that she had even worse health than the world supposed—nobody knew what she suffered.

A heavy load of doubt and anxiety had been already removed from Herbert's mind by the favourable results of the few last days; and his spirits received additional exhilaration from the arrival of a note from the Mortons, inviting them all to dine at Dodswell, on Thursday the twenty-eighth; and again politely hoping that Lady Lacy would have the kindness to dispense with the formality of a call from Lady Louisa. Lady Lacy was appeased by this message; and

though she vowed that she would not compromise her dignity by going over to Dodswell to call upon Lady Louisa, yet had not the least objection to dining there on the twenty-eighth. Sir William groaned at the sight of the note; wondered that people could not let each other alone; and said, with a desponding air, that his days of peace and comfort were past.

"I suppose, Sir William, I may say you will go?" said his lady, not at all moved by his distress.

"Certainly not, if you can help it. Cannot you think of some excuse? I dare say there is no moon; come, be nervous, cannot you? You would not surely come back along those bad roads on a dark night?"

Lady Lacy went to consult the almanack, and soon informed him that on the twenty-eighth, the moon would be nearly at the full.

"Provoking!" said the baronet. "To be dragged out against one's will to eat another

man's dinner, when one had so much rather have one's own. Disengaged too—good moon—good health—every thing against one—not the shadow of an excuse. Why could not I have the gout now? It often comes when I don't want it—even a cold would save me—I have a good mind to have a cold, only I am so inconveniently honest, I cannot tell a lie without some foundation. Well, my lady—what now? Are you studying Moore's predictions?"

Lady Lacy, with a puzzled look, was poring over the almanack. "They have made a mistake," said she. "The twenty-eighth is on a Friday; now the note says, Thursday the twenty-eighth. I suppose they meant Friday—Sir William, don't you think so?"

Sir William did not hear her.

"Sir William!" she repeated, "Friday is the twenty-eighth—we must go to them on Friday."

"Well, my dear, I am quite resigned. Oh! there is Herbert—Herbert, have you any engagement for the twenty-eighth?"

"None whatever."

"Very well—then, Lady L., you may tell them, that Herbert will come too."

Lady Lacy's answer was soon written, sealed and sent, and nothing further occurred worthy of attention through the long interval between that time, and the twenty-eighth. The expected first visit was looked forward to with very different feelings by the three members of the party invited—by Sir William Lacy, as a positive evil, to which he was hardly reconciled by thinking it a necessary one; by Lady Lacy, with more curiosity than she chose to confess; and by Herbert with that deep feeling of lively interest, with which a youthful lover may be supposed to contemplate an event, which restores him once more to the society of the object of his attachment. His first presentation at the king's levee, had not been half so full of interest and excitement, as was the prospect of this, the first evening that he should pass in the house of Mr. Morton. Every thing seemed to favour

him—every thing had turned out well, beyond his utmost expectations. Prejudices had melted away, which he had deemed almost immoveable; and the reconciliation had been so easily effected, that he was now more inclined to wonder why the families should have been so long disunited.

All would now be healed; and Sackville, the common friend of both families, was happily at hand, to cement their friendship and strengthen their growing feelings of good will.

CHAPTER XVI.

Afflict us not, ye Gods, though sinners,
With many days like this, or dinners.
SOAME JENYNS.

At length the twenty-eighth arrived; the carriage was at the door, and after waiting some time for Sir William, with whom punctuality was not among the foremost of his virtues, the party set out for Dodswell. It was a cold and rainy afternoon, thoroughly uncomfortable, as a cold day in summer always is. Sir William was particularly annoyed at the weather, and uttered a good deal of invective against English seasons, and country hospitalities. "This is what I call pleasure," said he, with an ironical grin, as he threw himself back in the carriage.

"Conceive, if you can, a spectacle more delightful, than that of a whole family going, in the very worst of weather, six miles out and back again, actuated and supported only by a noble determination to do as other people do. Seriously, this was all very well in the dark ages, but we ought to have devised some better system in the nineteenth century. People must set a higher value upon themselves to think it can be worth your while to take all this trouble for the sake of five hours of their society. I hope we are not early. They deserve to wait dinner for asking us. I would even have the gout at this moment, to escape that purgatorial period of suspense, that one undergoes in the drawing-room. There is another blot in the system. People should sit down as they come. Nobody should be waited for. The comfort of dinner is ruined by ceremony. If I were a king, as the children say, I would abolish the whole etiquette of the table, and let people do as they like. What in the world would it

signify, if one even eat one's cheese before one's fish?"

"It would look very odd," said Lady Lacy.

"Look! ay, there we are—and pray, Ma'am, what signify *looks?* Nobody looks well, when they are eating their dinner. Nobody ever saw man, woman, or child, that sat for their portrait, painted eating; a proof that the action is not becoming."

At length they arrived within sight of Dodswell. It was a fair specimen of the average of private gentlemen's places. The grounds were of tolerable extent, but flat and tame; the house, spacious and respectable in its appearance, but by no means conspicuous for ornament; and built, in that absence of all styles, which, for want of a better name, we call English. In fine weather, the place looked tolerably pretty; but now, with its damp, green flats, its deep, dark masses of wet foliage, and the melancholy groups of dingy sheep, congregated round the black stems of the spreading

elm-trees, it looked thoroughly dull and deplorable; and Sir William did nothing but abuse it all the way from the entrance-gate to the house-door.

Arrived there, and the bell being rung with all the energy of impatience, by the dripping servant, there arose a fresh subject of complaint, in the delay to which they were exposed, the summons not being answered with the alertness usual in such cases. The baronet grumbled exceedingly at their tardiness, and as soon as the door was opened, without more ado, bustled into the house followed by his wife and son. Mr. Morton's butler, who did not seem much better pleased than the baronet, stared, and shuffled, and hesitated, as he conducted the party through the rooms, and at last said rather drily, "that his master and mistress were dressing for dinner."

"Oh! then we are in excellent time," said Sir William. "I am glad to hear it," with a

look at Lady Lacy which expressed quite the reverse.

The servant stared again, looked at their dresses, and announcing, in a muttering tone, "Sir William and Lady Lacy," as he crossed the doorway of the next room, withdrew, with the same inexplicable look of perplexity with which he met them at the entrance door.

No sooner were their names announced, and scarcely had they entered the inner sitting room, than a gentleman, in an evening dress, who was sitting in an arm chair reading a newspaper, rose and came forward to meet them, and they found themselves accosted by Mr. Sackville. He received them with that graceful ease and warmth which were always at his command; yet he was evidently taken by surprise; and there was something in his manner which they could not entirely understand.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said he, after the first greetings. "I had given up all hopes of meeting you here."

"Why, to be sure, it *is* bad weather for leaving home," said the baronet; "but you don't know how hardy we are."

"And we always keep our engagements," said his lady.

"Do you?" replied Sackville, with a laugh, which had evidently some meaning in it which none of his hearers comprehended.

With this they might probably have been soon made acquainted, for he was going to proceed in explanation, when the door opened, and Miss Morton entered the room. She cast a look of much surprise at the assembled party, advanced irresolutely, seemed confused and hurried in an unusual degree, and evinced an agitation, which for want of any other probable reason, was accounted for in the manner most flattering to Herbert, by Sir William, Lady Lacy, and the gentleman himself. These being their thoughts, it was not unnatural that they should partake of her embarrassment; and as both parties seemed very much at a loss what

to do or say, the dexterous self-possession of Sackville came very seasonably to their relief. In an instant he had gone through the duties of introduction, reassured Agnes by a look, and found them a subject to begin with in the unpleasant state of the weather. But before many words could be said on this subject, both he and Agnes seemed desirous to change the conversation, and to say something else, which they scarcely knew how to bring in.

At this crisis the door was opened a second time, and in walked, slowly, Mr. Morton, dressed for dinner, deliberately unfolding a well scented cambric handkerchief. He had made two or three steps into the room, before he appeared conscious of the presence of his visitors; but upon seeing them, his surprise was testified even more strongly than was that of Agnes, and of Sackville. He stopped short, looked as if he scarcely believed his eyes, and uttered a short exclamation of astonishment. It was evident that he did not expect his guests,

and that there had been some mistake: what it was remained to be told, and this was soon done.

"We expected you yesterday," were almost his first words; and the state of the case was made clear at once. It required all Sackville's command of countenance, to forbear a smile at the effect of the discovery, and the exercise of all Mr. Morton's politeness to be able to add, with a tolerable air of sincerity, some broken sentences about "unexpected pleasure," and "glad not to miss them entirely." His chagrin, nevertheless, was very apparent, though perhaps, a good deal might pass with his guests for the effects of embarrassment and surprise. He, however, prudently covered his confusion by a speedy retreat, professedly for the purpose of apprising Lady Louisa of the arrival of their guests, but really, with a view of arranging matters behind the scenes.

He soon re-entered the saloon with Lady Louisa, where they found Lady Lacy, still inflicting upon Agnes her oft repeated wonder

how the mistake should have occurred ; declaring she was always very particular ; never did such a thing before, nor ever knew a similar instance. Lady Louisa received her guests with great politeness and good humour ; and said just what was necessary, and no more. It was an occasion admirably fitted to show her off to the best advantage ; for she had too much apathy to be disconcerted or ruffled by surprise or vexation ; and as her manner was almost the same to everybody, that which seemed a tame and heartless greeting to intimate friends, bore a very respectable character of warmth to those who were almost perfect strangers. Therefore, though unused to shine, her well-bred placidity in the present instance, made her appear, in the eyes of her visitors, a much more amiable and agreeable person than even her more popular husband, in whom mortified vanity and habitual good breeding were exercising a painful struggle.

To a man, proud, sensitive, and ostentatious,

as Mr. Morton was, it must be confessed, that the present incident, though somewhat ludicrous, was very trying. Few persons appear to advantage when suddenly put out of their way; and many who bear great trials with admirable fortitude, are not proof against the vexations of petty domestic misadventures. In fact, Mr. Morton was wounded in his tenderest point. He had been particularly solicitous to make a favourable first impression upon the Lacys. His house had been filled, on the preceding day, with a large and fashionable party, containing, among others, Lord and Lady Malvern, and a younger brother of the Duke of Swansea, all of whom had left him that morning. It had been a party well calculated to display his high connections, and good reception in the world; and to gain him, as he thought, the respect, and perhaps the envy, of his more aristocratic neighbour. Nothing had been wanting to make his entertainment handsome, even beyond what could have been expected from one of his apparent means;

and not only had this opportunity been missed, not only had the non-arrival of the Lacys produced a delay on the preceding evening, and injured the symmetry of the arrangements, but these very people, of all others, whom he wished to impress with an idea of his consequence, must burst upon him by surprise, and make themselves witnesses of the meagre homeliness of a family dinner. Added to this, Sir William, who was always attracted by the ludicrous side of every circumstance, seemed so much diverted with their strange mistake, that Mr. Morton began to suspect that it had not been totally unintentional; and as the baronet was known to be waggishly disposed, and had, by living so much to himself, acquired the character of an eccentric man, nothing of this kind appeared so improbable as it would have been in another person.

Mr. Morton's pride was chafed almost beyond concealment by this last galling supposition; and it was as much as he could do to

preserve a proper demeanour towards his guests. His anger found a plausible vent in the long delay of dinner: and truly this was not one of the least of their miseries. For one tedious hour, at least, did they sit in dull and blank suspense. In spite of all they could do, conversation flagged extremely. They had few topics of common interest. Mr. Morton was too fidgetty and abstracted to be in the humour to contribute much. Sir William Lacy was annoyed at having to wait so long for his dinner. Lady Louisa was no great talker; Lady Lacy was depressed by a consciousness that the whole mistake had been of her making; Herbert and Agnes did not feel quite at ease; could not shake off the impression that their situation was known and observed; and were anxiously considering the probable results of this inauspicious first visit.

Sackville was the only person who was perfectly cheerful and unembarrassed; and a little conversation between him and Herbert was

almost the only thing that tended to enliven the party till the long-desired announcement of dinner. This was heard as a most welcome relief by all; for independent of those vulgar dictates of nature which periodically admonish us that, however refined, we must be fed, they would have been glad, at that time, of any change of place and occupation. Every countenance seemed to brighten, and Mr. Morton's improved in an especial manner. He was consoled by the appearance of his table, which was, all things considered, very creditable. Some of his best plate had been hastily pressed into the service. The repast, to be sure, was scanty; but then the *plateau* was rather too large for the table; so that upon the whole it did not look ill filled. By degrees he got into good humour with himself, his table, his household, and his guests; and though the fish was overdone and the soup cold, yet, trusting that in other respects Monsieur the cook, had acquitted himself in such a way as to bring no dis-

credit on himself and his master, he at length ventured to apologize and deplore, with tolerable cheerfulness, the infamous dinner which his visitors were compelled to eat.

Only one thing more of any consequence occurred to vex him. He had some very good champagne, part of a batch which Lord Rodborough had imported, a circumstance much in its favour; and in this point was his vanity wounded. It was not that any other wine had been carelessly substituted, nor had it lost its spirit and flavour; but in their haste they had omitted to ice it. Heaven and earth! What an oversight! He took some with Lady Lacy, perceived its deficiency, and blushed as he drank it.

Meanwhile Lady Louisa, though the miseries of the table generally fall most severely on the mistress of the house, had been enjoying a state of great tranquillity. She left almost every thing to the direction of her husband: and little cared whether the arrangements of their *menage*

looked well or ill in the eyes of her visitors. She frequently repeated to them, without any variation of words or tone, her regret that they had not come yesterday; but as she had not been put to the extra trouble even of a thought by their unexpected arrival, she really cared very little about it.

Agnes felt distressed, from the fear lest her father's foible should be perceptible to Herbert, and thereby lower him in his opinion. Her fears were partly justified, for Herbert was too quick and accurate an observer not to have clearly understood the nature of Mr. Morton's feelings; but as these were prompted chiefly by a wish to appear to advantage in the eyes of him and his parents, and were therefore rather flattering, he did not judge them very severely.

Matters gradually improved. The worst was past; and Mr. Morton's apprehensions began to subside when dinner was over. The effect of increasing intimacy began to be felt in

a more general diffusion of vivacity; and conversation was no longer almost confined, as it had been at first, to Herbert and Sackville. Sir William was not fond of sustaining any conversation, unless on subjects that particularly interested him, and generally confined himself to dropping occasional humorous remarks. But these, though too often like angels' visits, "few and far between," had always an enlivening effect. Sackville had powers of entertainment which rendered him truly an acquisition, and these powers he had now exerted.

When they reassembled in the drawing-room, all were, or seemed to be, happy. Of Herbert's happiness there could be little doubt; for he soon found himself talking to Agnes rather apart from the rest, so as to be heard by her alone, recalling the few last delightful days of his visit at Huntley, all but declaring his attachment, and rejoicing to reflect that these half-admitted, half-uttered declarations, were made beneath her

father's roof, under his eye, and perhaps not entirely without his approbation. He was glad to perceive that Sir William took frequent opportunities of talking to her, listened attentively to her observations, and seemed pleased with what she said. Mr. Morton's eye was also seen to turn sometimes towards his daughter and Herbert; but its expression was perfectly benign, and neither of them shrunk from its scrutiny. The latter part of the evening amply compensated to Herbert for the mortifications of its commencement, and it was with no slight regret that he found himself obliged to take his leave. The parting, however, was very satisfactory. Lady Louisa gave him a gracious smile; Mr. Morton shook him very cordially by the hand, and Agnes allowed him to take hers; nor did she at all displease him by the conscious blush with which, fearful of observation, she withdrew it from his prolonged pressure.

All the party went away well pleased with

the result of this visit. Sir William had collected ample food for his love of the ludicrous in the events of the evening; and gave full vent, on his way home, to all the satirical pleasantries that had come across his fancy during the last five hours. "I like this Morton," said he: "the man has some pleasant absurdities in him. I don't care if I take pot-luck with him again. He is like a land tortoise: if you want to see him to advantage you must take him unawares, before he can get his head into his shell. The animal's mail stands him in the same stead that good breeding does Morton."

Lady Lacy was confirmed, by the observation of this evening, in her opinion that Mr. Morton was certainly a gentlemanly man; thought Lady Louisa an agreeable woman; remarked how handsomely they seemed to live, and shrewdly suspected that this was not their every-day style, and that, in fact, whatever they might say, they certainly had expected them.

Before they retired to rest, Sir William took

an opportunity of conveying to his son privately, the result of his observations upon Agnes Morton. "Herbert," said he, "to set your mind at ease—I like her. I will say nothing of her looks. I could not make you think her handsomer by any thing that I could add, and if I did not admire her beauty you would only wonder at my want of taste. I cannot judge of her disposition. It may be good, or it may be bad, for all one knows after five hours' acquaintance. Her manners, I think, are good; they are natural and elegant, and free from peculiarity. I should think she was sensible. I did not hear her say a foolish thing, but all was right-minded and well expressed. She has a turn for pleasantry; *that* I like. I don't want girls to be brilliant themselves, but they ought to understand the brilliancies of others. It is a great thing to be able to laugh at the right time; and it is an art, let me tell you, which few possess. Miss Morton does possess it; and thence I augur well of her

capacity. She seems to have read, and to like reading. That is another good thing. It saves women from tittle-tattle, and much ado about nothing. Then, she is observant and well-judging. I thought she seemed distressed for her father, when she saw him fretting and fidgetting, because the fish was overdone, and his overgrown *plateau* had been set on in the hurry rather awry. I am sure she would be above such trifles. I think I have said enough to show you that I don't disapprove of her; but still you must not be precipitate—I won't have you throw yourself at her feet yet—let us grow better acquainted with the Mortons before our families are irrevocably united. I wish for prudence and circumspection, and you, Herbert, are one from whom I can look for obedience, even in such a case as this. And now, good night. Digest at your leisure all that I have said about Miss Morton; and if you have any grace you will dream of her."

Whether Lacy fulfilled to the letter his father's

injunctions, has not been clearly ascertained: but never certainly had he retired to rest with a more triumphant sense of difficulties overcome, and a more full assurance of eventual and speedy success, than visited his mind that night. Armed with the approbation of both the fathers, fearing from the mothers no violent opposition, and satisfied of the unaltered state of the affections of Agnes, what obstructions could he apprehend? The prospect was fair and flattering; and that benignant Providence which kindly withholds from us a knowledge of the future, allowed him still awhile to revel in that sweetest of mortal banquets—Hope.

END OF VOL. I.

SHACKELL AND BAYLIS, JOHNSON'S-COURT.